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The C.A. Salt Project

Todd Borho

Part 2 Of The Evolution Saga

Main Characters

Zippo – Smuggler in his early 20s.

Ara – Zippo’s new smuggling partner, and lifelong friend, also in her early 20s..

Year: 2031 – 2 Years after beginning the C.A. Salt Project in The James Bong series.

Episode 1

Scene 1

A small, 3D-printed, hemp powered cargo seaplane is descending quickly and with a wobble over the Sonoran Desert. It is piloted by Zippo and Ara is by his side.

Ara: Don’t crash.

Zippo (cringing, clutching control lever): I’m not gonna crash.

Plane wobbles side-to-side.

Ara: You’ve done this before, right?

Zippo: You’re not helping.

Ara (pointing to a little patch of smooth, compacted sand in between a cluster of cacti): You’re landing there?! You’ve gotta be kidding.

Zippo: You’re still not helping.

Zippo clutches the controls with white knuckles and clenches his teeth as the seaplane makes a bumpy, unorthodox, and speedy touchdown. A dust cloud envelops them as they stare blankly ahead and take a deep breath. They turn and face each other.

Zippo: Aren't ya glad ya came?

Ara: You should be glad I didn't puke on you. (huffs) So now what?

Zippo scans horizon, then looks at customized, 3D printed phone and checks for messages.

Zippo: My contact isn't here yet, so we wait.

Ara: What's your contact's name?

Zippo: People call him Ramblin' Man.

Ara (giggling): Ramblin' Man? Why is that? Did he magically come to life straight out of an old spaghetti western?

Zippo: Cuz he rambles. He's a motormouth.

Ara (peering back at the cargo behind them): So this motormouth is gonna buy all this seafood from us?

Zippo: Nope.

Ara: Then what are we doing here?

Zippo: He's gonna trade with us. We give him fresh seafood, caught this morning, and he gives us hemp materials for 3D printers and hemp fuels.

Ara: Ah, ok. These people you're working with don't like money?

Zippo: I’m paid in the crypto of my choice. Everything else is just a straight trade, worked out in advance.

Ara: Who pays you?

Zippo: I’ve never met them in person.

Ara squints and purses lips. Zippo shrugs.

Zippo: It’s been electronic communication only. They supply me with this super-sweet customized, encrypted phone, all the info for the trades and locations, the merchandise, vehicles, etc. Everything I need to do this is provided. All I have to do is get done what they want done.

Ara: And you don’t think this is a little strange?

Zippo: Sure, it’s strange. But on the other hand, I have to respect their privacy. I get paid, and I’m not doing anything wrong, so why not?

Ara: So that boat in the middle of the ocean where we picked up the cargo, there was nobody there?

Zippo: Nope. There never is. Just a few service bots. And it wasn’t the middle of the ocean. It was only a hundred miles offshore.

Ara: Why would anyone go through so much trouble to remain anonymous? So why did you invite me along this time? You usually go alone, right?

Their conversation is interrupted by a huge vehicle, barreling down over slight hills in the distance. It’s a giant, blue, customized vehicle, a hybrid that looks like a tank, eighteen-wheeler, and ATV got mashed together.

Ara (shocked face): What the…?

Zippo: That's Ramblin' Man.

The vehicle skids to a precarious stop just a few meters from the plane. They hop out of the plane, and Ramblin' Man jumps out of the high driver's seat.

Ramblin' Man (excited): Hey there, Zippo! Hey girl I don't know! We'll exchange pleasantries later! Time is of the essence! We gotta make this swap! Well, don't just stand there with your jaws dropped, let's get movin'!

Ara (whispering): Is he always like this?

Ramblin' Man continues to ramble in background.

Zippo: The incessant chattering, yeah, but he's usually not in such a rush. (gestures to Ramblin' Man and interrupts the ramble) Hey! What's the rush?!

Ramblin' Man: I just told you I blew through an extortion-funded rights violation checkpoint about ten miles back! Don't you listen? You never listen, man! (groans, straightens cowboy hat)

Zippo's and Ara's eyebrows shoot up.

Ramblin' Man: Man, it was one hell of a chase! I'll have to tell ya all about it some other time. I think I lost 'em after I went off road. They're no match for Blue Bear! (gestures to monster cargo truck) Of course, there might be some drones out there tracking, who knows? Anyway, go ahead and scan my stuff, and I'll scan your stuff, and we'll be on our way.

Zippo scans cargo in the truck with his phone, and Ramblin' Man scans the cargo in the plane with his phone.

Zippo: Looks good. Now why the hell did you blow through a checkpoint?

Ramblin' Man: Cuz I've had some, uh, issues with my fake IDs lately. Don't know why. You might wanna take that into consideration on your trip! Anyway, always a pleasure doing business! (hops into plane)

Ara (shocked): Hey, wait a minute! What is he doing?

Zippo: He's gonna fly away with the seafood.

Ara: What?!

Zippo: And we're riding away with a bunch of refined hemp products. Now come on, get in.

Ara struggles to get into the high door of Blue Bear. Zippo laughs.

Zippo: Come on, chaparra! So much for high speed getaways...

Ara (laughing): Shutup!

They get in and Ara marvels at the control panel, which has multiple holo touchpads up, down, and side to side.

Ara: There are more controls in here than in the plane! Why so complicated?

Some of the holopads get brighter. Blue Bear thrusts forward, and they start rolling over the rough terrain at a frenetic pace.

Zippo: Most of these controls never get used. They're just for contingency.

Ara: Contingency?

Zippo: In case of emergency.

Ara: Like what?

Zippo: Like that (points to sky at police drone).

Ara: What are you gonna do?

Zippo: Keep driving.

Ara: And?

Zippo: And wait to see what it does. I wonder why Ramblin' Man had problems with his ID? I'm gonna stay off road as much as possible to avoid checkpoints, just in case. That should help.

Ara: Fake ID? You both have one?

Zippo: Yep, and you have one, too.

Ara: Should I thank you or hate you? How did you get the ID? And what kind of ID is it?

Zippo: One for me, and one for the vehicle, and a travel permit, business permit, etc. I get them all from the same source as everything else.

Ara: The same dude?

Zippo: Dude, lady, group, who knows?

Ara: You don't even know their name?

Zippo: The ad I answered only said "C.A. Salt". Could be a person, or a company, or a giant load of fertilizer. I don't know.

Zippo gives annoyed look into rear view screen, steps on accelerator.

Zippo: Man, that thing is pretty fast.

Red and blue lights start flashing at them from the drone. A siren also blares at them and the drone barks orders in a robotic voice, telling them to stop the vehicle and exit with hands up.

Zippo (sighs hard): Ok, that's it. Time for contingency. (presses a series of buttons on the holopad above him)

Ara: What are you doing?

Zippo: Sending a small, direct EMP.

Ara (rolls eyes): Ok, James Bond.

A few seconds later, the drone fizzles and drops from view.

Ara (mouth agape, staring at Zippo): So your EMP works, but not your fake ID.

Zippo: Apparently, but not sure about the ID yet.

Ara: So why did you invite me along again?

Zippo: They want me to bring someone else in, someone I can trust. They need another courier.

Ara: Is that what you call yourself?
Zippo: Well, that's kinda what I'm doing here.

Ara: And why me?

Ara: I've known you since we were little, and you're tough, and smart.

Ara: This is a little out of my league, I think. I mean, I've had a few scuffles here and there, but….

Zippo: And it's always in defense. You don't go looking for a fight, but you don't take any crap. You defend yourself well. You're tougher than you look.

Ara: Again, should I thank you or hate you for saying that?

Zippo: Anyway, we have a long way to go to finish this run. We'll see how it goes.

Ara: Where's our next stop?

Zippo: A few hundred miles northwest, in central Cali. (squints at horizon) Assuming we get past that.

Ara: Past what?

Zippo points straight ahead, where they're about to cross a two-lane desert highway. There are a group of extortion-funded vehicles with red and blue lights on top, waiting for them.

Zippo: That.

End Episode 1

Episode 2

Zippo and Ara are speeding off road as they approach a two-lane highway, where six extortion-funded order-followers and their cars have set up a road block.

Ara: So what are you gonna do?

Zippo: Go around them and stay off road.

Ara: And if they shoot?

Zippo: This thing is bulletproof. As long as we're off road, I feel pretty good about our chances.

Ara: How comforting.

Zippo makes a sudden turn just before reaching the blockade on the road shoulder. Blue Bear roars as it goes around the extortion-funded checkpoint. Clinking noises start to rattle as they straighten back out into the desert terrain.

Zippo: Hey, it works!

Ara: What works?

Zippo: The bulletproofing!

Ara: You didn't know?

Zippo: Well….I was told it was bulletproof, but..

Ara: Some friend you are. (looks out the window) If we're not using any roads, how will we find our next destination?

Zippo: I don’t really know technically how it works. All I know is that a computer in this ride makes a peer-to-peer connection with another computer at our destination. The computers basically make sure we end up in the right place.

Ara: In other words, GPS.

Zippo: But not with satellites. These are custom machines, using their own signals and software.

Ara: So they can’t be tracked like a regular car or phone that uses GPS?

Zippo: That’s right.

Ara: That’s brilliant!

Zippo: Yep, and as long as we keep that connection, we won’t get lost.

They drive through the evening and night, and in the wee hours catch a few hours of sleep. Shortly after sunrise and a quick breakfast the next day, they take off again. They’re within 30 minutes of their destination, in the rugged, forested, central California hills. An alert flashes on the main screen in the middle console.

Zippo: Uh oh.

Ara: Can you be more specific?

Zippo: We lost the connection.

Vehicle halts abruptly.

Ara: I can send them smoke signals if you want….

Zippo (frowning): Very funny. (talks to phone) Petunia, message rendezvous two and ask why signal was lost, please.

Ara (giggling): You call your phone Petunia?

Zippo (mock defensive): Well, I have to call it something. What do you call your phone?

Ara: Saucy.

Zippo: Saucy?

Ara: Yep, you know me. I’m all about the sauce.

Zippo: You do have a thing for sauce. Some might say an obsession.

Phone flashes, alerting Zippo to a message. He reads it aloud.

Zippo: Got raided by extortion-funded bullies in blue a couple hours ago. They stole all our product.

Zippo and Ara share a look.

Ara: What kind of product?

Zippo: Fertilizer.

Ara: Fertilizer?

Zippo: Aquaculture nutrient mix, if you want to be specific. And seeds.

Ara: Uh-huh. (thoughtful gaze out window) So you’re bringing that to someone in the middle of the ocean?

Zippo: Well, now I’m not so sure, but that’s what was supposed to happen.

Ara: Why would they get raided for that?

Zippo (shrugs): Not sure. Maybe for not paying taxes? Not having a license? Who knows.

Phone flashes, alerting them to another message. Zippo reads aloud.

Zippo: Another provider is willing to trade. C.A. Salt has approved. New provider will send location data shortly.

Zippo: Hmmm.

Ara: Something feels wrong, huh?

Zippo: This seems too convenient. I’m gonna contact C.A. Salt to confirm. Petunia, send message to C.A. Salt, asking to confirm new provider.

A brief moment passes, then Zippo is alerted to a voice call. He looks shocked.

Ara: Well, ya gonna answer it?

Zippo: Petunia, answer call.

A relaxed, confident voice, with a hint of hippie accent greets them: Hello, Zippo. Hello, Ara. Looks like we’ve hit a bit of a snag. A gang of order-followers with badges stole my supplier’s stuff.

Zippo: Yeah, I just wanted to know for sure if you had approved buying product from a new provider.

C.A. Salt: Yeah, we'll roll the dice on a new guy. I really need those supplies. You should already have their directions and contact information. Check your main terminal.

Zippo looks at main terminal on the vehicle dashboard.

Zippo: Oh yeah, I see it. Doesn't look too far from our original course. I'll head over right away. Anything else you need to mention?

C.A. Salt: Have you had a chance to read any of those ebooks I gave you? The ones about liberty and Natural Law and all that?

Zippo: Yeah, I got into them a little bit.

C.A. Salt: Great. Maybe we'll discuss them over a cup of rocket fuel one day.

Zippo: Rocket fuel?

C.A. Salt: Coffee.

Zippo: Sure, sounds good.

C.A. Salt: Good luck, Zippo. Don't get caught.

Click.

Zippo stares blankly at phone with perplexed look on face.

Ara: What's wrong?

Zippo: Nothing. Just the first time I've talked to C.A. Salt.

Ara (sarcastic): Was it everything you hoped it would be?

Zippo grimaces and starts driving again.

Ara: So when can I drive Blue Bear?

Zippo (relieved): I thought you'd never ask.

Zippo stops the truck again. They change seats and he gives an overview of the basic controls. She giddily throws it in drive and the monster truck starts powering over the hilly terrain again.

Ara: So about those contingency controls.

Zippo: I'll be in charge of defensive controls for now, ok? You just get the feel for driving this thing.

Ara: It's not like if I hit anything it'll do any damage.

Zippo: Still not a good idea to hit anything.

Ara: This thing is awesome! It's all 3D printed you said?

Zippo: That's right.

Ara: So whoever this C.A. Salt is has a ton of time on his hands.

Zippo: Or maybe a bunch of money to pay people to build stuff for him.

Ara: Or both. Have you asked any of your trading partners about him?

Zippo: No, that's not really good etiquette in the smuggling business.

Ara: You're not running anything illegal, so I'm not sure I'd call this smuggling.

Zippo: Are you kidding? All of this stuff isn't getting taxed! Not to mention some of the fertilizer we're going to get. It's all moving without a license. Why do you think we're avoiding checkpoints like the plague?

Ara: All tax-free, huh?

Zippo: Or extortion-free, as I saw it termed in one of the books C.A. Salt gave me.

Ara (face twists): Hmmm, I never thought about it like that.

Zippo: Yeah, there's lots of stuff in those books I've never thought about before.

Ara: Like what?

They come over the crest of a hill, and just as they start down again, a bear appears in their path.

Ara: Ahhh! What the…?! (slams breaks) What should I do?

Zippo: Go around the bear.

Ara (frowning at Zippo): Funny guy, huh? (turns wheel sharp to right, taps gas pedal, veers away from bear)

Zippo: Don't hit that tree.

Ara: I'm not gonna hit the tree.

Truck misses tree by inches.

Ara: Told ya.

They continue on for about another hour through the rugged central California terrain. They suddenly come to a broad clearing, with open fields and unique, customized buildings scattered about. They follow the computer's directions and come to a container castle. There's a large flag in front of the house that says in large, bold letters:

"DON'T TREAD ON ANYONE"

Ara (looking at Zippo): So now what?

Zippo: I'm calling. They're not answering.

Ara: Should we knock?

Zippo: Let's knock.

They get out and approach the front door of the container castle. Just as Ara is about to knock, an old female voice shouts from behind:

Voice: Don't move!

End Episode 2

Episode 3

Zippo and Ara are standing in front of the container castle, frozen stiff, wondering about the old, female voice that just came from behind them and yelled “Don’t move!”

Ara turns a shoulder.

Voice: I said don’t move!

Zippo: I thought you were expecting us. Maybe we’re at the wrong place?

Voice: No, no. There’s a rattlesnake passing behind you. Just be still, and it’ll pass.

Zippo and Ara both shudder involuntarily and gulp loudly. The snake slowly winds its way past them. When the old lady behind them feels they’re safe, she speaks.

Old Lady: Ok, you can turn around now.

Zippo and Ara turn around to see the character that just gave them a scare. It’s a little old lady, with fire in her eyes, and a giant pistol strapped to her hip.

Old Lady: You’re here for C.A. Salt, right?

Zippo: Yes, that’s right.

Old Lady: You can call me Raze. Most people do. What can I call you?

Zippo: I’m Zippo, and this is Ara.

Raze grabs Zippo's hand and shakes it briskly, then does the same with Ara, smiling continuously.

Raze: Well, come on inside, if you want. The service bots will do the loading and unloading. You can scan it after they're done.

Zippo: Well, I'd like to come inside, but I really need to keep an eye on the merchandise.

Raze: You could watch from inside.

Ara: A walk would be nice, stretch the legs after our long drive.

Raze: Ah, I see. Ok, that'll be fine.

They start walking down a minor slope. Two octopus-shaped service bots on wheels are busy moving containers out of one of the buildings and up to Zippo's transport.

Raze: Shame what happened to Mr. Potts, isn't it?

Zippo: Yeah, I don't know all the details, but it is a shame. May I ask how you know him?

Raze: He works with me. He's a distributor. Hey, I've got a question for ya. What do you know about C.A. Salt?

Zippo: Not much.

Raze: It's just kinda funny, ya know. Mr. Potts got raided by the goon squad called government after just a few deals with you, Zippo, and C.A. Salt by extension, of course. (stares at Zippo hard in the eyes) Strange coincidence, isn't it?

Ara: Are you implying that…?

Raze cuts her off: I'm just looking out for myself, my family, friends, and property is all. (looks back to Zippo) You're Mr. Potts newest client.

Zippo: I'm just a courier, plain and simple.

Raze (nodding): Ok, time will tell, I suppose. Normally, under such circumstances, I would've turned the deal down, the one we're doing right now. But it's a big order, and I was curious to meet you, so I obliged. Would you like to know some things I've heard about C.A. Salt?

Ara and Zippo nod reluctantly.

Raze: There's a bar a few miles up the road, called "The Casual Rabbit". Bars are good places to hear rumors and gossip, as I'm sure you know, especially in a rural setting like this. Anyway, I've heard things here and there about C.A. Salt. I've heard everything from it being a code name for a government operation, to an eccentric billionaire that's just bored to tears and passing the time, and everything in between. But the one that intrigued me most, and the reason we're doing this deal right now, is the rumor that there is a crazy old genius out there. He's out there on the ocean, trying to find a new way to live, free and away from all the chaos here on land. I hope that's at least a close approximation of what's happening. So, I'll ask you again, what do you know about C.A. Salt?

Zippo and Ara look at each other uncomfortably.

Zippo: I'm just a courier. I really can't say.

Raze sighs and watches bots as they finish the loading, then continues.

Raze: I can’t say that I blame him, trying to live out on the water, if that rumor is true.

Ara: What makes you say that?

Raze (aghast): Are you kidding me? Even just a sliver of what’s going on in the world is enough to make one shudder. Last year the gang calling themselves government was stealing houses from people who had bought the houses with cryptocurrency. Extortion fees called taxes go up every year. Rights-violating chokepoints on the road everywhere. Can’t do a damn thing in this world without permission from a bunch of psychos and violent order-followers with badges and fancy titles. The whole of society living under duress, so why not try and get away? Live free, and stop being such a slave to the dark occult ruling class and their system?

Zippo and Ara share amazed, wide-eyed glances. Raze pauses and studies their reactions. There is an awkward silence.

Ara: So I’m curious, do you have aquaculture tanks, or do you just sell the nutrient batches?

Raze: Yeah, I’ve been doing aquaculture for decades. I test out all the nutrient mixes before I sell them.

Ara: Have you experimented with saltwater?

Raze (content smile): Yep, with great success. But I can’t take all the credit. There are other recent tech developments that are used in the process. You have an interest in aquaculture?

Ara: Yeah, I’ve read a bit about it. So, hypothetically speaking, you think it would be possible to grow crops in the ocean?

Raze: Absolutely. That's another reason I tend to believe the crazy old genius living on the ocean theory, when it comes to C.A. Salt. (Raze receives an alert from her phone.) Well, the loading is done, and I've got other business to tend to.

Zippo: Ok, we'll head out then. It was nice to meet you.

Zippo and Ara head back to Blue Bear. Ara tries to take the driver's seat. Zippo has other plans.

Zippo: Not this time. I'll explain on the way.

They slowly exit the property and start making their way over the hills.

Zippo: We're getting on a highway soon.

Ara: So I can dodge bears driving through the hills, but can't drive on the highway?

Zippo: We're probably gonna go through a checkpoint, and I'll need to handle the IDs.

Ara: Why don't we just avoid the checkpoint?

Zippo: Sometimes there's terrain that not even this beast can handle, so I've gotta take a highway. And sometimes I even have to go into a city, which is a logistics nightmare when you're trying to be invisible.

Ara: Are we going to a city now?

Zippo: No, we're going to see El Conejo now. After that, we have to head to LA.

Within a half hour they're on a highway and after just ten minutes on the road, they come to a checkpoint. They roll slowly up to the blockade, where two uniformed rights-violators are flanked by two drones hovering overhead.

Zippo and Ara take deep breaths. Zippo hits a yellow button on the main control screen.

Ara: What's that?

Zippo: I'm checking to see what kind of drones those are.

Ara: Won't they see the readout?

Zippo: Not if I drive slow enough. (pauses, looks at screen impatiently.)

Screen flashes readout.

Zippo: Hmmm…

Ara: What does 'hmmm' mean?

Zippo shuts off readout as their slow, rolling stop ends. Zippo rolls his window down and looks down on order-follower.

Order-follower: Where ya headed?

Zippo: West.

Order-follower (huffs): Let's see your ID and permits.

Zippo holds out his phone to be scanned. He and Ara both notice the other rights-violator poking around at the back of their rig, running a scanner over it. There's also a dog sniffing it.

Order-follower (raised eyebrow): Marcelo Sol. Interesting, it looks like your personal ID doesn't match the vehicle data. (looks at back of the rig, then back at Zippo) Why don't you just pull off to the side there for me?

Zippo is chagrined that his ID didn't work. It's the first time that's happened, so Ramblin' Man was right. Why didn't it work now? What was different? What should he do? Pull over, use righteous defensive force against the road pirates, or speed off?

End Episode 3

Episode 4

Zippo decides to pull off the road. One of the rights violators tells him to open the cargo area. Zippo punches a few buttons and the back end of the vehicle opens. He keeps an eye on the rear camera. Once both rights violators are inside, he punches a couple more buttons. A heavy mist is released from four corners of the cargo area. The rights violators drop to the floor, sound asleep.

Ara (shocked): What did you do?

Zippo: Knocked them out with THC mist.

He focuses on sending the service bots to pick up the rights violators and get them out of the vehicle. The bots set them down a bit hard on the ground.

Zippo: Not as gentle as what I was going for. Anyway….

They zoom off, and are pursued by the drones.

Ara: EMP time for the drones?

Zippo: Yep. (hits button, then gets confused look)

Ara: What?

Zippo: It’s not working!

Ara: First your ID, and now this? Whatever he’s paying you, you need a raise for hazard pay.

Zippo (looking at speedometer, which reads 90mph): Damn, those things are fast.

Ara: Didn’t you know that from the readout?

Zippo: I wasn't planning on having a race. They weren't EMP resistant. That's all I was worried about.

The drones are now hovering on each side of the cargo truck, flashing red and blue lights, and barking robotic orders: "Citizen, stop vehicle immediately or lethal force will be used against you."

Ara: What kind of weapons do they have?

Zippo: Just bullets, I think.

Ara: Hopefully the bulletproofing on this thing isn't malfunctioning, too!

Zippo punches up readout on the drone specs again.

Zippo: Read that, Ara. Find a weakness. Fast.

Ara: 3rd Generation Darkhawk X Class Drone, Bulletproof, 24hour continuous battery runtime, top speed 200mph, internal AR-15 100 rounds, night vision.

Zippo: I know all that! Find a weakness.

Ara: I've got an idea!

Loud clanking noises start ricocheting off the truck.

Zippo: We're getting shot!

Ara: I'm gonna open the cargo hold.

Zippo: What good is that gonna do?

Ara: You'll see….

Ara punches buttons and opens the back cargo door. A drone hovers to the back to investigate. Once the drone is inside, Ara activates the service bots' defense protocols. The other drone is informed of the situation, and goes back to assist inside the cargo area. Ara then takes manual control of one of the bots and draws the drones near the front side of the cargo area, nearest the wall that separates the cabin.

Ara: When I say now, slam the brakes hard.

The drones come to within a foot of the cabin wall, as the bots slowly retreat backwards.

Ara: Now!

Zippo slams the brakes, and both drones, unable to react fast enough to change directions in time, are slammed against the monster truck's interior wall, and sent bouncing backwards with damaged systems, out the back door.

Ara: Floor it!

Zippo obliges. They speed off to temporary safety. After being on the highway for a while, they go off road again, and end up getting a short night's rest under the stars. Early the next morning, they make their way to Conejo's. It's a modest cabin nestled in the secluded hills.

Ara (unimpressed): We came all this way to see this shack?

Zippo: It's not a shack. Besides, it helps keep a low profile.

They park and exit as a wiry, cheerful fellow comes out to greet them.

Zippo: Hey Conejo!

Conejo: Hey, amigo! You brought a friend, I see.

Zippo: This is Ara.

Conejo: Ara, a pleasure to meet you. (to Zippo) Let's go ahead and get business done, then have a cafecito. What do ya say?

Zippo: How can I turn down the best coffee this side of the Rockies?

They start walking into the woods behind the house.

Ara: I thought we're picking up food.

Zippo: We are.

Ara: In the woods?

They come to a small clearing. Conejo sweeps some leaves away with his feet, revealing a flat metal flooring. He hits a button on his phone. The metal flooring slowly moves downward and stops about 20 feet down, inside a small warehouse. The warehouse is stocked with boxes of food, all organized and separated into groupings of different sizes. Some boxes are synthetic, and maintain frozen or refrigerated food.

Conejo (pointing to the largest group of boxes): That's yours.

Zippo scans the boxes.

Zippo: Looks like it's a few things short, again.

Conejo: Yeah, a few farmers got raided by the IRS mafia, and a couple of food packagers were attacked by an FDA goon squad. And a local naturopathic medicine producer got a visit from the

CDC mob. The usual. But you still got 88 percent of your order, so not too bad, all things considered.

Ara: So you don't make or grow any of this stuff?

Conejo: Nope, I just pick up from local producers and consolidate orders for customers. I take orders from buyers online, then get the goods from local producers and store them for pickup. It's big business since farmers markets were outlawed by the gang with fancy titles.

Ara: So you've basically got an underground farmers market on your property.

Conejo: Uh, something like that. Black market vegetables, who could have ever imagined? (hits button on phone, which triggers two service bots into action) How about that cafecito?

They go back up and sit down for coffee with Conejo.

Ara (looking at the bare walls of the cabin): Nice place….

Conejo (smiling): Yeah, I'm a minimalist. I've moved around a lot, so try not to accumulate too much stuff.

Zippo: Conejo, always on the run….

Conejo: Yeah, I've lived all over the world. I was a farmhand in Latin America, a cook on a merchant ship, a concierge in Europe.

Ara: Wow!

Conejo: Yeah, lots of variety.

Ara: What was your favorite?

Conejo: Being at sea, I think. (gets inquisitive look on face) Zippo, what do you think of C.A. Salt?

Zippo: What do you mean?

Conejo: I mean, I've heard lots of theories. We run in small circles in the so-called black market, right? And I still have contacts at sea, and I hear things from them. It's weird. I don't think it's just one dude. It's something more. Look at all the stuff you carry for C.A. Salt. It can't just be one dude.

Zippo: Man, you don't know all the details of what I run for C.A. Salt.

Conejo: Nope, that's true. If we examine the contents of everything you trade for C.A. Salt, I bet it would clue us into more of their activities. Their aims.

Zippo: Man, you know I can't do that.

Conejo (grinning, provoking): Come on, just this one run. Let's have a look at the manifest.

Zippo: Nope, can't do it. Sorry, Conejo. I trust you and appreciate you, but I have to honor my contract with whoever C.A. Salt is.

Conejo: What about her? (gestures to Ara)

Zippo: None of your business.

Conejo: Ok, fair enough. (glances at bottle of tequila on counter) Maybe liquid talkie will do the trick?

Zippo (sighs heavily): You're impossible. Anyway man, we need to…

Conejo: I know, you're always short on time. Gotta finish that run.

Zippo and Ara take off through the hills again. and drive the rest of the day and night, stopping at midnight to get some rest under a cool, Southern California sky. The next morning, they're just a couple hours away from entering Los Angeles, where the final trade of this particular smuggling run is to be made. Shortly before they start driving again, Zippo has some concerns about going into the city with the current ID troubles. He sends a message to his contact in L.A.

Ara: You have to put the thing into gear and hit the gas to start moving, ya know.

Zippo: I just messaged my contact in L.A. I'm not so sure about driving into the city with the IDs not working.

Ara (chiding): You've had enough high speed getaways for now?

Zippo: Well, it's exciting and all, but in interest of self-preservation…..(shrugs)

Ara: Yeah, you've got a point. So what are you thinking?

Zippo: He can come to us.

Ara: Think he'll do it?

Zippo: I offered him some crypto, so we'll see what happens.

Ara: And if he doesn't do it?

Zippo: I might wait for the ID to get fixed. I already messaged C.A. Salt about it.

Ara: And?

Zippo: He said it’s being worked on.

Ara: So you don’t know how long it might take?

Zippo: Not a clue.

Phone beeps and Zippo checks message. It’s from his L.A contact.

Ara: What’s the verdict?

Zippo: He said he can’t come to us, but could try and fix our ID problem. He’ll need the details to start.

Zippo gives thoughtful look to Ara.

Ara: You probably shouldn’t give him that info.

Zippo: You read my mind.

Sends message that he can’t give up that info, and receives an immediate, negative reply.

Zippo: Then we’ve reached a stalemate. (pauses) I need time to think.

They wait in silence for a few minutes, then are alerted to a message from C.A. Salt.

ID PROBLEMS APPEAR TO BE FIXED

Zippo’s face lights up. He kicks the truck into gear, pounds the accelerator, and they jolt forward.

Ara: Problem solved?

Zippo: C.A. Salt says so. Let’s just hope he’s correct.

End Episode 4

Episode 5

Zippo and Ara are now on a freeway within Los Angeles, having recently passed the initial entry checkpoint.

Zippo: All the IDs worked. What a relief!

Ara: Will we have to go through more checkpoints in the city?

Zippo: Hopefully not. I have an app running that alerts me to checkpoints, mapped out all over the city. Sometimes the bullies in blue change locations, though, and we could get caught off guard. Usually just getting in and out of the city are the biggest challenges.

Ara: I'm so glad I don't live in a big city. They're like giant rat traps and mazes all rolled into one.

They follow the checkpoint app map and zigzag their way through the city. After about an hour, they make their approach to a nondescript home in a middle class neighborhood. After backing into an empty driveway, they exit and head to the front door, which Zippo is astounded to find open.

Zippo (whispering): Wait a sec….

He pokes his head inside and sees the normal entryway, living room, and furniture, seemingly undisturbed. He motions for Ara to enter and holds a finger to his lips to request silence. Upon entering, he gently pushes the door closed enough to obscure the view of anyone outside, but doesn't shut it completely, in order to avoid making noise. Then he slowly pulls a 3D-printed pistol from a holster under his shirt. Ara does the same. They go upstairs stealthily. The second doorway they come to is open. Normally the door is shut. The windows are completely blacked out. This is normally the merchandise area and office of his contact, with

spare parts and gadgets cluttering the room, and stacked a few high against the walls. This is not the case today. The room is completely empty, except for a few neatly arranged boxes, a clean work desk, and someone sitting in a leather office chair at the desk. Zippo and Ara gasp. The lone figure at the desk looks at them curiously.

Zippo (confused): Who, or….what the heck are you? And what are you doing here? (points gun at lone figure)

Lone figure at desk (smiles politely): I am a female, humanoid AI. I am bulletproof, so pointing a gun at me is pointless. I have the materials requested to complete your trade. Would you like to make the trade?

Zippo (lowers gun, takes deep breath): Where is the property owner?

Female AI: Are you talking about Mr. Wu, also known as Firewire?

Zippo: I’m not saying anything. You could be a cop!

Ara: Or a criminal without a badge.

Female AI: But I am offering all the goods that you came for, is that not all that matters?

Zippo looks at Ara, then back at the AI.

Zippo: Come on Ara, we’re leaving.

Female AI: I’m sorry to hear that. Have a nice day.

Zippo and Ara back out of the room slowly, keeping a close eye on the AI. They get back in Blue Bear and leave in a rush.

Ara: What the heck was that?

Zippo: I dunno. I've never had so many weird things and incidents happen on a run.

Ara: Lucky me….

Zippo: I've gotta send a message to C.A. Salt and tell him what happened.

Ara: Do you think that thing was a cop?

Zippo: My instincts tell me no, but I can't be sure.

Ara: What about Firewire? You should try contacting him.

Zippo: I already did. No response.

Eerie silence.

Zippo: That room is usually packed with spare parts, gadgets, and gizmos, and it was almost empty. What happened to all that stuff?

Within an hour, they've received a message from C.A. Salt that they don't need to pursue another supplier for the last load. Zippo and Ara are out of the city within another hour, their IDs working flawlessly as they pass through two rights-violating chokepoints. After a restless sleep, Zippo drives Ara back to their previous meetup location, near their hometown in northern Arizona.

Ara: You sure I can't finish the trip with you, and see this mysterious ocean drop of yours?

Zippo: After all the close calls we've had, I'm surprised you want more.

Ara: Oh, come on. We've known each other our whole lives. You know I've got a fierce adrenaline addiction.

Zippo: True. Well, I can't take you to the final drop. C.A. Salt's rules. Sorry.

Ara: I understand. So you go trade this thing back to Ramblin' Man for the seaplane, is that right?

Zippo: Yep, then fly out to the Pacific, and make the drop.

Ara: Do you think C.A. Salt is gonna hire me?

Zippo (sarcastic): Not a chance.

Ara: After you give me a one star review….

Zippo: Hopefully he will. Anyway, I gotta go.

Ara: Bye, Zippo.

Zippo takes off through the desert, and meets up with Ramblin' Man in the middle of nowhere. They move the cargo into the seaplane, Ramblin' Man rumbles off in the cargo truck, hootin' and hollerin' in a cloud of dust.

Zippo flies the seaplane at low altitude to avoid radar, and is guided by police monitoring apps to avoid drones. Once over the Pacific, he breathes a sigh of relief, as there is much less violently imposed regulation on the water. He finds the designated coordinates about 80 miles offshore, and there is the same vessel as before, a large, sleek, customized, mostly 3D-printed yacht with various mobile terraces and decks scattered from front to back.

He goes to the designated loading dock and starts to unload with the service bots, when suddenly, he hears a familiar male voice.

Male Voice: Hello! Welcome to C.A. Salt!

End Episode 5

Episode 6

At the end of Episode 5, Zippo was in the middle of unloading the seaplane's cargo on the mysterious ship in the Pacific, as he always does. The ship on all previous trips was not occupied by any people. This time he was interrupted by a male voice shouting from a top deck with a megaphone.

Male Voice: Welcome to C.A. Salt!

Zippo (shocked): What?! Who are you?!

Male Voice: I can't hear you! I'll come down and help you finish the unloading!

Zippo's heart jumps. He waits impatiently while the mysterious figure comes down on an open elevator. He was pretty sure it was his contact, presumably the owner of the ship, but he couldn't be too sure, especially after the AI debacle in L.A. A thin, cheery-faced, middle aged man steps off the elevator platform.

Man: Hi, so nice to meet you in person! (shakes Zippo's hand vigorously)

Zippo: Are you C.A. Salt?

Man (scoffs): Hardly. Let's finish unloading, and then go up for some coffee and a chat. You did bring the coffee, didn't you?

They finish unloading in a few minutes with help from the service bots, and make their way up a few levels and into the interior of the ship. The man goes to make some coffee on a small stove. He offers Zippo a seat at a little breakfast bar facing the kitchen area.

Man: The name I go by is B. Light. It was one of my pen names, but, we don't need to discuss that. That's yesterday's news. As for

C.A. Salt, it is a concept, an idea, a codeword, a project. It is many things. I suppose you're wondering why all the secrecy? And why am I meeting you in person now?

Zippo: Yeah, I've got a million questions.

B. Light: All in good time, we'll get to know each other, and many questions will get answered. What I can tell you right now is that I am very pleased with the work you've done with me so far, and I'd like to offer you an opportunity for more. Much, much more.

Zippo: I'm listening.

B. Light (pouring coffee for Zippo): Ok, where to begin? C.A. Salt is my name for a voluntary community that I've been painstakingly working on for the past couple of years. There are twelve ships permanently at sea at the moment, as far as I know anyway. There could be more. Humble beginnings, I'll admit, but great things take time, I suppose. What I am offering you is an invitation into it. You can learn the technical skills necessary to start out, and begin living at sea, on your own ship, if you wish. I, and others I have contact with, can help you along the way. Well, I can't speak for them, but I'll help you get started, anyway.

Zippo (uncertain laugh, mouth open): You want me to live on the ocean? Why would anyone want to live on the ocean?

B. Light (astounded): Because there is no gang with fancy titles, euphemistically known as government here, of course.

Zippo: Why are you asking me this now? Why not up front?

B. Light: Well, I had to make sure I could trust you. You've proven yourself, time and again, especially on this last trip. You didn't give up any information to anyone you didn't know. You

evaded the order-followers in costumes. And from what my land-based trading partners tell me, you have exhibited great moral character from day one. That, my friend, is the most important. You don't aggress, but you will defend.

Zippo: What do you mean by order-followers?

B. Light: Police and soldiers. You have much to learn, all in good time! And anyway, I wanted to add that you did very well in L.A. You didn't panic, you….(gulps coffee)...Ah, that's right, that reminds me, I need to show you a surprise. One moment, please.

He leaves the room and comes back with a box full of electronic parts and gadgets.

Zippo (stunned): Is that….

B. Light: Yes, what you were supposed to pick up in L.A.

Zippo: But how did you get it? Was that some kind of setup?

B. Light: Well, it was your final test, let's say.

Zippo: So who was the robot?

B. Light: That was Symphy, and she's much more sophisticated than a robot. She's one of the pioneers out here with me.

Zippo: And what happened to….?

B. Light: Firewire? On vacation, and his stuff scattered around different storage facilities. You didn't know Symphy, you didn't reveal anything, you didn't take the cargo, you didn't freak out, you just left. That type of secrecy is what is absolutely crucial at this point.

Zippo: Why? For what?

B. Light: Well, for starters, so you and I don’t get thrown in a cage for trading goods in an extortion-free manner. Although, I suppose it would be hard to prosecute a man that’s dead on paper, like myself. (pause) Anyway, secrecy, at least at this early stage of the C.A. Salt Project is necessary so that my associates and I don’t get violently attacked by any gangs with fancy titles, known more commonly as governments. Once more people are living freely on the ocean, in greater numbers, secrecy will gradually become less necessary, because larger numbers of free people are harder to oppress.

Zippo (staring thoughtfully into coffee cup): There aren’t police out here? What about military?

B. Light: No police. We’ve never crossed paths with any death squad Navy ships, but we do see an occasional drone.

Zippo: You’ve been out here two years?

B. Light: About that, yeah.

Zippo: How do you stay hidden, electronically, I mean?

B. Light: Well, I’m fortunate to have some very technically skilled people working with me. Symphy is one of them. They have some very clever techno-tricks. A new, decentralized network is being worked on right now, one completely outside the satellite-based system they use on land, but that’s still a few years from completion. I believe the name it's been given is "The Mesh", but don't quote me on that.

Zippo: What about water?

B. Light: Ah, yes. That's our secret weapon, so to speak. Without that, none of this would be possible. We have highly efficient, compact desalination machines, all 3D printable and replicable.

Zippo (stunned): What?

B.Light: Yes, this device was invented by one of the people involved in C.A. Salt, a few years back. It hasn't exactly gone mainstream, let's say, so most people don't know about it, but it is used by all the pioneers out here. While on the subject, you might be wondering about food. Well, you know that some is smuggled from land, just what can't be grown out here yet. There are ocean gardens on the ocean surface that are being experimented with, and some food is grown on board, of course. Look, I can go on for hours about all the methods and techniques that are used to survive and thrive out here, but the best way is to see for yourself. If you'd like, you can stay on my ship and help me out here until we can get you setup with your own rig. You'll be learning the whole time.

Zippo: How long would it take to get my own ship?

B. Light: About three months, roughly.

Zippo: What about Ara?

B. Light: Why, you want her out here with you?

Zippo nods.

B.Light: Well, I don't know her well enough yet to allow her to stay here, but once you have your own ship, well, you do as you please, as long as it's non-violent, of course. In the meantime, if you stay here with me, Ara can take over your job doing smuggling runs, if she likes.

Zippo: You trust her to make runs for you, but not live here?

B.Light: Absolutely.

Zippo: Why?

B.Light: Because if I lose a cargo shipment, or truck, or plane, it sucks, but it’s not that huge of a loss. If my freedom out here gets impeded, though, well, that’s the worst thing I can imagine here on earth.

Zippo: And if one day you get attacked by the government?

B.Light: Then I’ll defend myself and my property, and friends and family if they’re nearby. You’ve heard the term, ‘live free or die’, right?

Zippo nods.

B.Light: Well, those aren’t just words. It’s a way of life.

End Episode 6

Episode 7

Year – 2037

Main characters:

Verde – Young woman in her 30s, inventor of desalination device used in the C.A. Salt Project. Friends with B. Light.

Calypso – Seasteader in her late 20s.

Seak – Humanoid Male AI, created by Symphy.

Major Ruin – Extortion-funded order-follower for “US Naval Intelligence”

Scene 1

Over 40 ships gathered in the middle of the Indian Ocean, some are interconnected with each other. It is a free market gathering of Sea Agorists who are all part of the C.A. Salt Project, living permanently on Earth’s oceans. About 300 people are in attendance. The majority of them are watching an intense hover-sailing race, which is about to finish, as the three lead racers come to the finish line.

An AI pod at the end of the finish line records the ending and announces: Winner! By .25 seconds, the ship called “Floating Furball”!

Seak (applauding, leans over to Verde): You seem preoccupied.

Verde: Calypso’s late, very late.

Seak (puzzled): Calypso is usually late.

Verde: Not this much, and this event was her idea.

Seak: Are you (hesitates) worried?

Verde (snappy): Of course I'm worried! (takes shot of tequila off table and shoots it) I'm sorry, Seak. I know you're not even two yet. What if she was attacked?

Seak: There have been zero known incursions with the gang with fancy titles in the first nine years of the C.A. Salt Project.

Verde: I love that you say gang with fancy titles instead of the "government" euphemism. Symphy taught you well. It's just that the project is so big now.

Seak: 308 known ships with an undisclosed number of people.

Verde: Probably double that. That's only those on The Mesh.

Seak: It seems you might be apprehensive regarding an increase in the number of people involved in C.A. Salt. I don't understand why.

Verde: I know, I shouldn't be, but bigger means we're easier to see.

Seak: But government gangs will find out eventually. It is inevitable. Why do humans fear the inevitable?

Verde: I don't know. That's a good question. I don't know how to explain it. We just do!

Seak (frowning): I'm sorry to do this, but I must be going. I'm one of the dealers in the upcoming 3-tier blackjack tournament. Are you playing?

Verde (looking at bottle of tequila, sarcastic): Nah. I’ve got better ways of losing money.

Scene 2

A grim-faced, broad shouldered, middle-aged man is sitting in his home office. He stares blankly and frowns icily at a holographic image of a younger woman in uniform.

Grim-face: Unreal. Who else has access to this information?

Woman: Just you and I, Major Ruin.

Major Ruin: So we have an unregistered ship, of unknown design and build, and a hemp field floating out in the South Pacific. The surveillance we set up initially has been wiped out, and we don’t know how.

Woman: That’s correct, sir.

Major Ruin: What happened to the drone that initially spotted and reported this thing?

Woman: Still operable, as far as I know.

Major Ruin: Make sure that drone has backups of its memory made, then wipe it clean.

Woman: Yes, sir.

Major Ruin: This stays between us until I issue you further orders.

Woman: Understood, sir.

Click.

Major Ruin: What the hell is going on out there?

Scene 3

The blackjack tournament has just finished in the wee hours of the morning, and Seak is walking the deck of his ship, looking at the stars. He receives a call on his internal comm system.

Seak: Yes, who’s calling.

Caller: Jigsaw. I have something you’d love to have. We have 55 seconds.

Seak: Can you tell me specifics, Jigsaw? And how did you get my communication coordinates?

Caller: How I found you is irrelevant. Technology you need, a real game-changer.

Seak: Intriguing. Please send details to the quantum encrypter address I send you.

Jigsaw: No, it has to be in person. I don’t care how good your encryption is.

Seak: In person seems much riskier. I need some specifics.

Jigsaw: I work for Alpha Engineering. Look it up. I’ll contact you again in 24 hours. Time’s up.

Click.

Scene 4

Verde is about to doze off on one of the flex sofas on her ship, The Golden Blue. She is startled awake by an alarm from her ship's central computer.

Verde: What?!

Computer: Calypso's ship is docking with yours.

Verde jumps up and springs out to meet her friend Calypso on the first level, where the docking occurs. Calypso is breathless and gives Verde a tight squeeze.

Verde: What happened? You look exhausted!

Calypso: Long story. Have any chai?

Verde: Sure, come on.

They walk to an elevator and go to a kitchen on the top deck. Verde starts to make tea.

Calpyso (rushed, rambling): I have a problem. We have a problem. Did you paint?

Verde: Forest green, yes. Top deck only. (sarcastic) Is that the problem?

Calypso: So last week I was checking on one of my fields, and I saw a drone hovering over it. So I scanned it. It looked at me, then back at the field.

Verde: Which gang's death cult was it from?

Calypso: Couldn't get a reading, so I'm guessing CIA, not sure. I did get a reading on some of its capabilities, though, and it was basic enough to make me think it was just a surveillance drone.

Verde: So what did you do?

Calypso: I watched it for a minute. It was taking vid and pics, so I took off.

Verde: I would've shot it, or pulsed it.

Calypso: I thought about it. (pause) Anyway, it didn't follow me. The next day I went back and did a little investigating. Damn thing put waterproof spy gear in my hemp field!

Verde: Shameful! At least they didn't destroy it, though. So then what?

Calypso: I destroyed their gear, of course. (offended) Invade my property like that, how dare they!

Verde: Agreed.

Calypso: So, that's why I'm almost a day late. And stressed out, and tired, cuz I was paranoid they were gonna come after me.

Verde: Why didn't you call for help? Or let me know you were running late?

Calypso: Nobody was very close, and also I didn't want to send communications under the circumstances. Could get traced, who knows?

Verde: The Mesh is quite secure.

Calypso: I know, but I didn't want to risk it.

Verde: We should talk to Seak.

Calypso: And K and Symphy, too. All the super techie people.

Verde: They couldn’t make it to the event.

Calypso: Figures. K is a recluse, and Symphy’s always busy.

Verde: We’ll talk to Seak tomorrow. Get some rest.

Scene 5

The next morning, Seak gets another call from Jigsaw.

Jigsaw: Did you investigate the company I work for?

Seak: Yes, but most projects are dark it seems, so I know very little. Why have you contacted me? What are your motivations?

Jigsaw: We may discuss that in person. I went through a lot of time and effort to find you. Your project needs to go deeper, and I can help, so our arrangement will be mutually beneficial.

Seak: Deeper?

Jigsaw: You must know how vulnerable you are on the surface. Can you be in Santa Barbara, California in two days?

Seak: Yes, I can.

Jigsaw: Shoreline Park, noon.

Click

Scene 6

Verde: Seak, we need to talk!

Seak: I also have information I wish to share with you. Calypso, nice to see you.

Calypso (grinning): Always so formal….

Verde: Tell him what happened.

Calypso relays the story of the drone.

Seak: A regrettable experience.

Calypso: Such a gift of understatement!

Seak: I was contacted by someone from a company called Alpha Engineering. I had to do some digging, and finally discovered they are a black budget government mob contractor. Jigsaw, the one who contacted me, says he has tech to allow us to go deeper.

Calypso: Go deeper?

Seak: It would be highly beneficial to grow food and possibly live deeper below the ocean surface. Symphy and other Sea Agorists have been working on technology to do so for some time now, but progress has been limited.

Calypso: Strange coincidence, you being contacted by an extortion funded lab while I’m getting harassed.

Verde: Indeed.

Seak: Jigsaw wants to meet in person.

Verde: Where?

Seak: I will go on land, as I don’t wish to reveal my location at sea.

Calypso: You’ve never been on land!

Verde: Please don’t go alone.

Seak (shocked, confused): Why not?

Verde (deep sigh): Look, don’t take this the wrong way, but you’re kind of….

Calypso: Naive.

Verde: Yeah.

Seak looks offended.

Calypso: Obviously, you can go alone, if you want, but we just don’t want anything to happen to you.

Seak: But I have more physical strength, faster reflexes, and….

Verde: Yeah, you’re an AI stud, we get it. But you’re only two years old, and the only people you’ve ever had contact with are Voluntaryists out here on the ocean. We know right from wrong and won’t try to harm you. But on land, there are billions of people that don’t know Natural Law. There are order-following moral relativists in costumes causing harm all the time on land. I think a guide for your first time would be beneficial for you.

Calypso: Where exactly are you going?

Seak: Santa Barbara, California.

Verde: I think Ara has a run in that area coming up soon. Maybe she can take you?

Calypso: Yeah, that would be perfect. Girl has street smarts.

Seak: Why can’t one of you go?

Verde: We haven’t been on land in years. It’s better if you have a current land-based person with you, especially a top-notch smuggler like Ara.

5 minutes later, Ara is on a holo-call on Verde’s smart watch.

Ara (pouty face): Are you kidding me? You’re way out there in the Indian Ocean, and I’m in Arizona! I’d have to leave in like an hour!

Seak: I’ll meet you halfway.

Calypso (sarcastic): And you can be dazzled by Seak’s physics knowledge for hours during the trip.

Seak: Was that sarcasm?

Verde: And I’ll double your pay.

Ara: Oh, all right. Send me the coordinates where you want to meet.

End Episode 7

Episode 8

Scene 1

Seak and Ara are having a wobbly descent in a seaplane, just off the Santa Barbara coast. Ara is at the controls.

Seak: (peeking down at the twisting and bobbing ocean): Luckily, I don’t have emotions, otherwise I imagine this would be a quite fearful occasion.

Ara: Landing has never been my strong suit.

The plane makes a hard splash a couple miles off the coast. It automatically transforms its underside into a hull. They anchor and use mini-scuba jet packs to reach shore. Once ashore, they make their way up stone steps built into the cliff. They reach the park at the top.

Seak: He said he’ll find me.

Ara: I’m gonna wait up the hill and keep an eye on you. If you need help, I’ll run away.

Seak looks upset.

Ara: That was sarcasm.

Ara heads up a hill into a residential neighborhood and gets a high vantage point.

Seak sits on a park bench facing the Pacific. Within moments, a voice comes from behind.

Voice: You didn’t come alone.

Seak: Is that a problem, Jigsaw?

Jigsaw: Let's hope not. (Jigsaw is carrying a small case)

They start strolling through a grass promenade.

Jigsaw: What's in this case is going to change the world.

Seak picks up on his sensors that they are being listened to by remote devices somewhere in the park. He sends a frequency to neutralize their voice signals, but fool the recording device into thinking everything is normal. He also sends a message to Ara that they are being monitored.

Seak: We are being watched and listened to. I have neutralized the audio, but can do nothing about the visuals.

Jigsaw: Even after all the precautions I took, all the physical and digital tricks I employed (shrugs and huffs gruffly). Anyway, I'll finish what I started. This device magnifies and reflects sunlight, carrying it like a current, run by a type of nano-mirror I invented.

Seak (intrigued): This will allow for….

Jigsaw: Much deeper underwater possibilities for humans.

Seak: How did you find me?

Jigsaw: It sure wasn't easy. I heard rumors months ago about the project you're involved with. I had to sift through a lot of data, deep, deep, in the web. Some of it the dark web and very well hidden, I might add. After a lot of hacking I found a way to reach you through your network. Your project is a great concept, but it's doomed to fail. With this, though, you might, MIGHT, have a fighting chance.

Seak: Why me?

Jigsaw (sad smile): Because I don’t trust people.

Seak: And why doomed?

Jigsaw: Look how outnumbered you are! The only reason your project is still going is because they don’t know you exist. When they find out, your days are numbered. But I see why your project is good and I sympathize, which is why I’m giving you a fighting chance with this technology.

Seak: You invented this?

Jigsaw: Damn right I did! Took me over twenty years to get a working prototype and then those parasite employers of mine claimed intellectual property and shelved it! Been on the shelf for years now, those bloody control freaks.

Seak: Why didn’t you leave them and work independently?

Jigsaw: The funding, of course! Everything here is top-down centralized. Scientists like me either work for a large institution, or we don’t work.

Seak: Perhaps you could participate in the project I’m involved with.

Jigsaw: Nope! Not a chance. I’m too old to start over.

Seak’s sensors see two men that had been using the listening devices coming at them. He messages Ara to get the transport ready.

Seak: Do not be alarmed, but we are being approached by….

Jigsaw (interrupts, frantic): Where are they?

Seak: Northeast, 100 feet.

Two neatly dressed men in sunglasses, black jackets, and black cargo pants walk briskly towards them.

Jigsaw: Run! Save yourself and my invention!

Jigsaw starts running.

Seak: Don’t run! Confront them head-on!

One of the the pursuers fires a silent shot from a small cartridge. Jigsaw collapses. They shoot at Seak, who dodges the shots. Seak sends a pulse that knocks them unconscious. They fall to the turf. Seak disarms them, then goes to pick up Jigsaw, who is unconscious but still alive. Seak bounds away with the case and Jigsaw. Within minutes, he’s back on the ship with Ara.

Ara: What the hell!?

Seak: I recommend full defensive arsenal at the ready and get us out of here, far and fast.

Ara: Is he alive?

Seak nods.

Seak: Two attack drones of unknown capabilities and unknown origin are closing in on us.

Ara: I’m going sub mode.

Seak: There is no time for sub conversion. Take off immediately.

Ara revs the engines and they skim off the water and into the crisp, sunshine-filled air. Two drones pursue closely.

Seak: I'm looking for a way to neutralize them. They have sophisticated AI cores, for drones, anyway. You have frequency shielding up, right?

Ara: Don't ask me amateur questions like that. Of course! And nano-flex shields.

Seak: They are preparing to fire.

Ara: Fire what?

Seak: A weapon.

Ara: Damn your literal…..

A beam of pulsing light, changing colors erratically, fires from a drone and hits Ara's ship.

Seak: They're attempting to disable our nano-shielding. I'm trying to deflect their frequency.

Ara: I'm gonna direct an EMP at 'em.

Seak; They are EMP resistant, bulletproof, fireproof…..

Ara: Do you have any good news?

Seak: Not at the moment.

Ara: I'm gonna outrun them.

Seak: That will quickly deplete our fuel supply. (pause) Ah! Good news. Their frequency generator has been neutralized.

The drones keep pace at Ara's max speed of 800 mph.

Ara: Are their burner exhausts shielded?

Seak: Not that I can tell. Why?

Ara: Then that's their weakness. I have an idea. How good is your throwing arm?

Seak: What?

Ara: Can you propel the emergency oxygen tanks from the cargo hatch down below?

Seak: Are you suggesting that…..

Ara: We improvise an explosive. I slam the brakes, pull up hard, you toss the tanks at them, and the tanks…..

Seak: Explode from the extreme exhaust heat. Throwing oxygen into a fire.

Ara: Can you calculate a throw that good?

Seak (offended): Do I look like an amateur?

Seak grabs two oxygen tanks from a small storage area behind the cockpit and goes down to the cargo area.

Ara (communicating to Seak via ship's internal comms): Ready?

Seak looks at the drones and calculates all the physical factors involved, then gives the go-ahead. Ara slams the brakes and pulls up as hard as she can. The drones can't react fast enough to the change of speed and just as they zoom under Ara's ship, Seak hurls the oxygen tanks down at them. One explodes in a drone

exhaust flame, the other doesn't. The explosion is enough to send both drones tumbling out of control. Ara takes advantage of this and accelerates to full speed again, putting some distance between them before the drones can recover. Seak goes back to the cockpit.

Ara: Do we have enough time to go sub mode now?

Seak: There is a 62 percent probability that we do. Please hurry.

Ara dives the plane down to the surface of the Pacific once more and makes a hasty splashdown landing. She initiates the changeover sequence from seaplane to submarine.

Seak: I'm doing everything I can to interfere with their search capabilities.

Two anxious minutes pass, and just as the drones come back into view, the ship is finished transforming into a submarine and dives quickly under the surface.

Ara: Don't tell me those things can transform too.

Seak: No, it appears not. We appear to have avoided them.

Ara takes a deep breath and looks back at Jigsaw.

Ara: And what about him?

Scene 2

Major Ruin receives an audio-only call.

Voice: Mr. Ruin, you recently lost some equipment in the South Pacific. A surveillance drone of yours encountered a ship with

technologies not previously known to exist. We need to discuss this incident.

Major Ruin (shocked): Who is this?

Voice: We'll be at your home in one hour. And by the way, we have the drone footage that you deleted.

Click.

End Episode 8

Episode 9

Scene 1

Major Ruin gets a knock at his door. He opens it and there are two men on his doorstep. One is a smug looking, older character, and the other is a younger, strong-arm type.

Old Character: Major Ruin, we spoke on the phone earlier. May we come in?

They walk past Ruin before he can speak.

Ruin: Who are you?

Old Character: You may call me Mr. Holo, and this is my associate, Shank. You might be eager to know the nature of our visit.

Ruin: If what you said on our call was true, then yes, I'd be fascinated to know. If you could produce...

Mr. Holo: The drone footage that you so unceremoniously deleted?

Ruin gives a stern look.

Mr. Holo (amused): There's no pulling rank here, Major. We're all friends, right, Shank?

Shank cracks knuckles. Mr. Holo pulls a thumb-sized gadget from his jacket pocket. It turns on and emits a holo-image. The image is video taken by the drone showing the encounter with Calypso's ship and hemp field. Ruin gulps.

Mr. Holo (grinning): Satisfied? (looks at holo-projection) It's a marvelous ship, isn't it? Powered by hemp, also, from what we can tell, convertible to a seaplane and also submarine. And the communications! Well, its encryption is of a type far beyond military capabilities. And one woman on board, that we know of. All alone, on a ship like that, in the middle of the ocean?

Ruin (impatient): Ok, so what? So what's your business?

Mr. Holo: My employers are in the technology business. I work for a company called Alpha. We make the drones that you toy soldiers use in the military. I normally don't lower myself to speak to your kind, but necessity dictates that I do. By the way, Major Ruin, this conversation never happened. Do you understand?

Shank cracks knuckles. Ruin nods.

Mr. Holo: I need to speak with you because you are the only person to have seen this footage that is not authorized. You have accidentally stepped far beyond your normal, mundane boundaries.

Ruin (red-faced): Now listen, you're in my home, and….

Shank steps toward Ruin. Ruin shuts up.

Mr. Holo: Such a short temper, how detestable! (rubs finger across glass table, looks at dust streak) And your housekeeping skills leave much to be desired as well. Now, I'm here to give you a job. You will use military resources to find more fields like this, and the people who are creating them, and more ships like them, if possible. You are to find out all you can about just what is going on out there on our seas, things that are certainly troubling to both you and I. And you will do all of this without reporting any of it to anyone in the military. Do you understand?

Major Ruin (scoffs): That's not possible. There's the chain….

Mr. Holo: The so-called chain-of-command, yes. The trouble with that in this scenario is, in this case, Major Ruin, that I outrank the entire military. (smug grin, shows teeth) And don't worry about your superior officers. I can assure they'll be taken care of if they give any trouble. All you have to do is track these sea devils down and report your findings to Alpha.

Major Ruin: And if I don't?

Shank cracks knuckles.

Scene 2

Seak and Ara have just finished their escape from one of the Alpha drones. Their ship is still underwater, in sub mode. Jigsaw is slowly coming back to consciousness.

Ara: Looks like we can ask him what he wants to do here in a minute.

Seak gets in Jigsaw's face and examines him. Jigsaw slowly opens his eyes.

Seak: Can you hear me, Jigsaw?

Jigsaw (startled): Huh? What? (looks around frantically) Where am I? What?…..Those guys from Alpha….

Seak: We have successfully evaded them. They stunned you and you lost consciousness.

Jigsaw (looking around, freaked out): And...you brought me with you?! Are you nuts?

Seak: I do not believe it is possible for an AI to be “nuts”.

Ara (sideways glance): So you think….

Jigsaw stands up and peers around at the screens showing underwater life floating past.

Jigsaw: You’ve got to take me back!

Seak and Ara share a confounded look.

Ara: If you go back, they might do something worse than knock you out, you know that, right? (looks at Seak) What have you gotten me into?!

Jigsaw: Well, I can’t stay out here.

Seak: Why not?

Jigsaw: Look, you don’t understand. When you work for Alpha, they take very extreme measures to make sure you’re kept in line. They’ve got DNA tracers….all kinds of tech that isn’t known to the public yet, let’s put it that way. They’ll find me out here, and then you’ll be compromised. If that happens, then my attempt to help you will be a complete disaster.

Ara: Well, if that’s what you want, I’m not gonna argue.

Seak: But if you go back, it is like….a form of suicide, almost. They may kill you.

Jigsaw: I made that choice when I decided to contact you. Now take me back. One of you should take that little gift bag I gave you and share it far and wide, as fast as you can. And the other takes me back.

Seak: Very well, I'll search for a ship to rendezvous with.

Seak sends out a quantum encrypted message to all ships on The Mesh requesting a rendezvous. He receives a response in a couple minutes.

Seak: Zippo is only a couple hundred miles west. He has agreed to meet us.

Ara: Did you tell him the situation?

Seak: Well, not everything….

Ara (slight smile): You act more like a human every day.

Scene 3

The next day, Seak is back on Verde's ship, meeting with Calypso's ship in the South Pacific. Verde has converted her ship to sub mode, and they are 10,000 feet below the surface. Seak is showing them the new tech he smuggled with Ara and Jigsaw. Verde and Calypso are bug-eyed.

Verde: It's almost like light on the surface!

Seak: Indeed.

Calypso: Jigsaw was right, this changes everything. How does it work?

Seak: The detailed or the basic version?

Verde: Trust me, Calypso, you want the basic.

Seak: Very well. Trillions of smart nano-particles move continuously throughout the water from the surface to the desired

depth. They act as reflectors and magnifiers, as needed, in order to create a stable current of sunlight.

Verde: How deep do you think they can work?

Seak: From what I've been able to decipher, they could theoretically work to near infinite depths, due to their self-replicating capabilities.

Calypso: That might be a bit much, but a few thousand feet would be great!

Verde: We can grow massive amounts of food underwater now.

Seak: And have an extra layer of security. Adding another dimension to living space possibilities would be very advantageous.

Calypso: There could be permanent places to live down there!

Verde: Tell me we're not the only ones with access to this.

Seak (faking offense): What kind of an amateur do you take me for? It has already been shared with all humans and AI on The Mesh. You'll never guess who gave the first human response.

Verde and Calypso stare at Seak.

Seak: You don't want to guess?

Verde: No!

Seak: K.

Verde: K contacted you?

Calypso: Who’s K?

Verde: One of the original seasteaders out here. He came shortly after Symphy, James Bong, and Miss Moneybit. B. Light and I contacted them first about the C.A. Salt Project.

Calypso: How come I’ve never heard of him or met him? I’ve been out here a couple years.

Seak: A few years ago he chose to….how shall I say it….lead a solitary lifestyle.

Verde: He became the world’s first sea hermit. Anyway, that big tech news you laid on him must have peaked his interest. He’s a tech genius, the one who created Symphy.

Calypso: Speaking of tech genius, did you hear anything from Ara? Did Jigsaw make it back to land safely?

Seak: Yes, he was dropped off in California.

Calypso: And?

Seak: And we might never know what happened to him. I have no way to contact him, and he surely will be hunted down by Alpha Engineering.

Scene 4

Three days later, Seak receives a holo-call. A skinny, paste-white face pops up in front of Seak.

Seak: Mister K, what a surprise.

K: Seak, I'm ready to get back to work.
End Episode 9

Episode 10

Year: 2045

Over 3,000 ships are now known on The Mesh Communications Network to be seasteading. There are also over one hundred ships permanently at sea that have not chosen to get on The Mesh network. Many deepwater gardens are thriving. There are three permanent structures in various geographic locations that seasteaders call home. One of these, originally built in 2039 and the first of its kind, stretches between 8,000 and 13,000 feet below the surface, in the Atacama Trench about 100 miles off the coast of Chile and Peru. Violent, extortion-funded gangs with fancy titles (governments) have quietly stepped up their pursuit of those involved in the C.A. Salt Project. The seasteading, anarchist pioneers have, in turn, developed more advanced defensive technologies and techniques in order to evade the state.

Scene 1

Mr. Holo, an agent from Alpha Engineering, is having a drink at the estate of his boss, Richard Checker.

Richard Checker: Mr. Holo, you've been with Alpha for a great deal of time, and have had a great career. However, I've had a somewhat troubling meeting with the board of directors, which is why I needed to speak with you.

Mr. Holo: Sir, I know that…

Checker interrupts.

Checker: Please, let me finish. It has been nine years since that turncoat scientist Ray Regalo released classified technology to the public. At the same time, ships that were not previously known to exist were found, quite accidentally, as I understand it. Since that

time, it has been found that there are indeed undocumented people and ships permanently at sea, living outside of the law. You were tasked with finding out more about what is going on out there, and putting a stop to any use of the technology taken from Alpha. And you have failed miserably.

Mr. Holo: Sir, with respect, I beg to differ.

Checker: Wait. I have a question. This nano-technology that reflects and amplifies sunlight, if in use under the oceans, should create obvious bright spots that can be found, right?

Mr. Holo: We should be able to do that, but..

Checker: But what?

Mr. Holo: We have been unable to detect any such radiance in deep water. I believe that whoever is using Radiance technology has found a way to mask it. Cover it up, so to speak.

Checker: A type of cloak, you say?

Mr. Holo: Yes.

Checker: I am not aware of any such capabilities.

Mr. Holo: Neither am I, sir, but…

Checker: You believe it exists. And then there's the problem of finding these fantastic vessels.

Mr. Holo: My military contacts have said they're like ghosts, sir.

Checker: Beliefs and ghosts, Mr. Holo. We work for a multi-trillion dollar company, and the best you can come up with is beliefs and ghosts?

Mr. Holo: They must have a way of seeing us come. Military vessels, private Alpha craft, CIA, it doesn't matter. They have a way of seeing us coming, and evading us.

Checker: And satellites, Mr. Holo?

Mr. Holo: Satellites, radar, sonar, it doesn't matter. Some anomalies show up on satellite from time to time, but disappear before we can get to them. They are mobile, and have very advanced technology.

Checker: And where are they getting this technology, other than the Radiance that was taken from Alpha?

Mr. Holo: They develop it themselves, I suppose.

Checker: What about AI?

Mr. Holo: They have very advanced AI. We know this from the pursuit of Ray Regalo, when he was giving Radiance away. He escaped for a short time out to sea, on a ship with a female and a humanoid AI.

Checker: Then there's the question of funding and supply lines.

Mr. Holo: Our efforts at infiltrating their networks have revealed that there is no central apparatus for trade, no single monetary system, so to speak. They use highly encrypted forms of barter and blockchain-based cryptocurrencies. They have a private communication network outside of our internet that we have been unable to break. We know very little of the supply lines, but it seems that some decentralized networks exist linking land and sea.

Checker (angry, gruff): Dammit, Mr. Holo, who are they?! What do they want? Who are their leaders? How many of them are

there? I want answers, and I want results! Do you have any idea who we work for?!

Mr. Holo: I don't know who they are, or what they want, or who their leaders are, if they have any. There could be a hundred of them, or there could be thousands. We don't know.

Checker: Holo, there are other agencies and private groups working on this problem. There are some, like myself, who feel that it's time to take this information public, in a way that suits our agenda, of course.

Mr. Holo: To what end, sir?

Checker: War, of course.

Mr. Holo: Might I remind you, sir, that there have been seven documented confrontations between either private or public military forces, and whoever these ghosts are, they have escaped every time. We must fight them quietly. Doing so publicly could be embarrassing.

Checker: And what information was gained from those confrontations? What was learned about the enemy?

Mr. Holo: Well, we were unable to identify many of them, but….

Checker: Mr. Holo, someone who might not know you as well as I do might think that you're sympathetic to their cause, that you're helping to cover their tracks.

Mr. Holo (extremely agitated): How dare you, after all my years of loyal service!

Checker: Silence, Mr. Holo. You service has been appreciated, and handsomely rewarded, I might add. It has come time, though, for you to retire.

Mr. Holo (shocked): But I'm not ready to retire!

Checker: Be a good sport now, Mr. Holo. (Checker presses button on table, two heavies walk in, crack their knuckles)

Checker (thin smile): These gentlemen will show you out, Mr. Holo.

Mr. Holo goes kicking and screaming with the two heavies. Checker makes a call.

Checker: Mr. Holo has been retired.

Phone Voice: Explain your rationale.

Checker: How else could people and ships just disappear from government and corporate databases? How else can they be nearly invisible? They must have help from the inside. Holo was focusing on this problem for far too long to not get more results. We need more aggressive action. Overt and covert.

Phone Voice: Very well, Checker. Your input is appreciated. However, there are some who believe that overt action is not a good course at this time.

Checker: Why not?

Phone Voice: Because if the slaves discover that life is occurring at sea, off our plantation, then they might try and escape the plantation.

Checker: But, there are some who support overt action, and….

Phone Voice: There will be no argument from you, Checker. You have wide license to operate covertly, and that’s it. The public must not be brought into an overt war, at least not yet. Goodbye, Checker.

Click.

End Episode 10

Episode 11

Scene 1

Zippo and Ara are cruising in separate ships on the surface, side by side, about 300 miles off the coast of Peru. They're having a holo-call.

Zippo: You glad you came out here permanently?

Ara: Yep, it was hard at first, but more than worth it. No taxes, no fines, not living under threats.

Zippo: Hard to imagine how we used to live on land, huh?

Ara: And horrifying, in some ways.

Zippo sees something coming on the horizon.

Zippo: Hey, what's that up ahead? You see it?

Ara: Yeah, looks like a small sailboat, but its not emitting any electronic signals.

Zippo: Yeah, I'm starting to get a better picture of it….it looks like just a plain, small sailboat.

Ara: The old fashioned way. Pretty bold.

Zippo: Oh, I've done that.

Ara: Liar.

Zippo: Ok, I've thought about doing it.

Ara: Wanna say hi?

Zippo: Sure, why not?

Within minutes, they are cruising parallel to the sailboat. Its simple design and construction makes it look antique compared to the techno-marvels that Zippo and Ara are in. Zippo sees a scruffy, middle-aged man steering the ship in the back. The man glances at Zippo, smiles and waves.

Zippo (yelling): Hey, nice ride!

Man gestures to someone out of Zippo's view. A woman appears and brings a megaphone to the man.

Man (into megaphone): I can barely hear you! Don't you have voice amps on that fancy ship?

Zippo cringes, as he forgot to turn the sound amplifiers on. He summons a holo-control and turns it on.

Zippo: Sorry about that. I said nice ride!

Man: Would you like to come aboard and see it?

Zippo: Sure, want me to help you park?

Man: That'd be lovely, thanks!

Zippo and Ara flank the sailboat and use their AI controlled nano stabilizers to keep their ships and the sailboat stationary. Zippo and Ara come aboard the antique-looking vessel.

Man: Hi, my friends call me Haze, and this is my partner, Macy.

Zippo and Ara introduce themselves.

Zippo: What brings you way out here?

Haze: Sailing the Pacific Coast, going back up to Oregon.

Ara: Wow, you've been out here a while, huh?!

Macy: Too many months to remember. And you? Are you driving those fancy boats, or are they driving you?

Zippo: It depends on the day.

Haze: Going anywhere in particular?

Zippo: Nope, just out cruising.

Macy: Where are you from?

Ara: The desert.

Haze: You ever pilot one of these?

Zippo: Not like this.

Haze: Ah, there's nothing like it. Ya wanna try?

Zippo: Sure, we could auto-pilot our ships to follow. (looks at Ara) Come on, you up for this?

Ara (reluctant): I suppose.

Zippo: We'll be right back.

They each go back to their ship. While there, Ara calls him on her encrypted smartwatch.

Ara: Are you sure about this?

Zippo: What, why not? They don't have any electronics on board, so how can they get any data from us? They're just simple sailors.

Ara: Oh, all right. But I get to pilot their boat first.

Zippo: Not fair, but ok.

They set the autopilots on their ships and go back to Haze and Macy's little sailboat. When they get back, Macy offers them cocktails.

Zippo: Nah, I'd better not.

Haze: Ah, come on, you've got autopilot!

Zippo: Ok, sure, just one drink.

Ara (stiff face, glaring at Zippo): No thanks, I don't drink.

Macy: Maybe a water, then?

Ara: No thanks.

Haze: Well, you've gotta have something to toast with us! I'll get you a bottled water, how about that?

Ara: If you insist.

Haze: I'll be right back.

Haze goes below deck, emerges with a bottle of water, and hands it to Ara. He grabs his cocktail and raises his glass.

Haze: To the sea!

All: To the sea!

They all take a sip. Within a few seconds, Zippo and Ara collapse onto the floor. Haze notices that Macy is about to speak, but cuts her off….

Haze: Just….be…..quiet…..and…..wait.

Meanwhile, at a secret Oceanic Security Operations base in the Andes mountains, a small group of men and women in uniforms are sitting at an array of computers and holo-screens. A large, central screen sits above it all, which shows an overhead view of Haze and Macy's sailboat on radar. A gruff man with spiked hair and hollow eyes smiles thinly at the image.

Gruff Man: Remarkable. We can see the sailboat, but not the other vessels.

Male Order-follower at desk: We don't know how many vessels, sir.

Gruff Man: Correct, but we're about to find out. How far out are our ships?

Female Order-follower at desk: ETA five minutes, sir. One sub, one light cruiser, and two airborne drones.

Gruff Man: Let's see how they react.

Male Order-follower: Colonel Waif, why aren't the AI systems on their ships doing something about the target's physical situation?

Colonel Waif: You mean they're knocked out, and nothing is happening.

Male Order-follower: Yes, sir.

Colonel Waif: Because they're not checking for chemicals. They think they just went to sleep, and everything is fine. At least that seems the most probable reason.

The military ships begin arriving. First a sub, followed shortly by the cruiser, and finally the drones pass over slowly.

Colonel Waif: Good, nice and slow, don't wanna alarm anybody. Where are the video feeds from our ships? I wanna see what those damn ghosts look like!

The main holo-screen above them splits into multiple smaller "screens", each showing different angles of Ara and Zippo's ships, from the perspective of the sub, drones, and cruiser.

Colonel Waif: This is all being recorded and stored in the appropriate channels, right?

Female Order-follower: Yes, sir.

Colonel Waif: Any reaction from their ship's AI systems?

Male Order-follower: None that we can detect, sir.

Colonel Waif: I have a hard time believing that as much trouble as they go through hiding, that they don't mind being monitored and recorded up close. What do you think of that?

Male Order-follower: I think that…

Colonel Waif (cuts him off): Your job isn't to think.

Male Order-follower: Yes, sir.

Colonel Waif: What was your name again?

Male Order-follower: Lieutenant Torcer, sir.

Meanwhile, Ara and Zippo’s ships send encrypted messages to the nearest SeAgorists they can find, informing them of the statist aggression.

Colonel Waif: I’m feeling bold. Torcer, send four scouts from the cruiser aboard both enemy ships and take a look around. Machine scouts to one, human scouts to the other. See if they react differently.

Two rights-violators in black tactical gear board Ara’s ship, while machines go onto Zippo’s. Immediately, the ship calmly informs the intruders that:

Ara and Zippo's Ships: This is private property, and your trespassing is a violation of Natural Rights. If you do not leave immediately, righteous self-defense will be used against you.

Colonel Waif: Well, that answers that question. Tell them to get out of there.

All scouts leave the ships without incident.

Colonel Waif: Ok, now for another test. Get everyone off the sailboat.

Lieutenant Torcer: Sir, may I make a suggestion.

Colonel Waif: Go ahead.

Lieutenant Torcer: If we take both the enemy combatants with us, their ships might pursue, and possibly attack. If we leave them on board the sailboat, their ships might think everything is ok, and not react.

Colonel Waif (thin smile): That's quite the conjecture, Torcer, but you just might be right. Well done, Torcer. Send the interrogation unit to them, in plainclothes, and tell them to make the conversation appear as friendly as possible. Meanwhile, get all battle stations ready.

Female Order-follower: Yes, sir.

The extortion-funded military cruiser approaches the small sailboat. A man in a dark suit hops on, as does a thick-necked rights violator in a t-shirt and jeans.

Moments later, Macy is feeding another cocktail to Ara. This one brings her slowly back to consciousness. When she opens her eyes, she sees the man in the dark suit, thick-neck, Macy, and Haze.

Ara (groggy): This wasn't part of the vacation package I ordered.

Dark Suit (looking at Haze): We're good on the soundproofing, right?

Haze nods.

Dark Suit: What is your name?

Ara: I'm a free, sovereign being. What's your name?

Dark Suit (angry frown): Where are you from?

Ara: The universe.

Dark Suit (leaning close to Ara's face, whispers): I can make your life miserable, you know.

Ara: You're already making it miserable.

Dark Suit: Where did you get the technology for your fancy boat there?

Ara: From the free market.

Dark Suit: Where is the technology from? Who invented it?

Ara: Someone with freedom invented it. You see, creation flourishes when people obey Natural Law. You should try it some time. It's good for the soul. (smiles broadly)

Dark Suit (looks at thug in jeans and t-shirt): What the hell is she gibbering about?

Thug shrugs.

Ara: Ok, I've had enough of this. It's been a lovely kidnapping and all, but I want to go back to my ship now.

Dark Suit: That isn't what's kidnapping. You came on your own free will. But I'm afraid I can't let you leave yet.

Ara: And then I was drugged, and now you are holding me against my will, so yeah, it really is a kidnapping. Anyway, my ship is more than capable of overpowering your little thug brigade here, so I think I'll go ahead and call it into action.

Dark Suit: Afraid it can't hear you. Soundproofing. A wonderful thing, isn't it?

Ara: Who do you work for?

Dark Suit: You're not the one asking the questions.

Ara: That's ok, I already know the answer.

Dark Suit: Is that right? (insidious laugh) Ok, I'll humor you. Who do I work for?

Ara: You work for the involutionary force, the entropic force. You destroy. You are the opposite of creation. Another term for it is Satanic. Or the dark side. Take your pick, that's what you work for, and you're so egotistical and wallowing in ignorance that you don't even know this.

Dark Suit leans down and gets into Ara's face again, then whispers gruffly:

Dark Suit: Maybe I do know this.

Back at the mission control base in the Andes….

Colonel Waif: She won't give answers now, but I'm not done with her yet. Torcer, send Agents Haze and Macy orders to sail that boat to the Peruvian coast. I've got a hunch that as long as those machines think that all is well, and they're just following the sailboat, we might just be able to lure them into my own little personal shark tank. And have our team down there give the girl another special drink to make sure she's neutralized.

Torcer: Yes, sir.

Meanwhile, Seak is coordinating with others from the C.A. Salt Project, about how to handle the situation.

Seak: This is the third such incursion of this type this year, a very troubling trend.

Voice: I think the secret of C.A. Salt is out.

End Episode 11

Episode 12

Scene 1

Seak is on a holo-call with Blaze.

Blaze: How many?

Seak: From all the information I'm able to gather off The Mesh, it appears there are two vessels escorting the sailboat, and another four en route to rendezvous within the next hour. Half of the vessels are surface, and the other half sub. There are also eight airborne drones closing in on their position.

Blaze: So I'm waltzing into a small battlefield, basically.

Seak (mildly perplexed): I do not understand what dancing has got to do with the situation.

Blaze: Figure of speech, Seak. Give me some good news.

Seak: The good news is that two ships from the SeAgora are within range and can intercept their route in an hour. There are also four vessels preparing to launch from the Atacama Community, but due to their depth and logistics of launching, they may arrive….

Blaze: Late to the party.

Seak: Again, I do not see what a party has to do with this situation.

Blaze: Send me the real-time data link from The Mesh so I can map this out. What are their tech capabilities like?

Seak: Inferior.

Blaze: That doesn’t mean they can’t hurt me.

Seak: They are all bulletproof and EMP resistant. Two of the ships carry phase-changing hyper torpedoes. Two of the others carry rotating gamma guns.

Blaze: Give me a weakness, Seak. Something I can exploit. How did Ara and Zippo get into this mess in the first place?

Seak: It appears to have been a ruse. They were lured onto the vessel.

Blaze: And their ships didn’t take any defensive action?

Seak: Their ships did not sense any harmful intentions from their situation.

Blaze: And nobody can take control of one of their ships and do the rescue remotely?

Seak: They have been programmed to not allow outside control, even by an AI from The Mesh.

Blaze: Well, isn’t that convenient. So who else is going on this rescue mission with me?

Seak: Calypso.

Blaze: I know her.

Seak: And Funny Fish.

Blaze: Funny Fish?

Seak: That’s what he goes by.

Blaze: So who’s gonna get there first?

Seak: It appears that at the current pace, you will. I’ve sent you the quantum encrypted contact information for Funny Fish. You can speak with….

Blaze: Yeah, I’ll call him and Calypso. Just one last thing. Send me all the data you have on those extortion-funded cult ships I’m about to encounter. I’ll find a weakness and coordinate with Calypso and Funny Fish, if that’s a real guy.

Seak: Why would I…

Blaze: That was sarcasm, dude. Anyway, I’m out. Send me updates as needed.

Blaze ends call and has his ship’s AI arrange a 3-way call with Calypso and Funny Fish.

Blaze: Calypso, nice to see you again. The last time I saw you….

Calypso: Not the time to bring that up, Blaze.

Blaze (sly grin): Fair enough. Funny Fish, nice to meet you.

Funny Fish: Likewise. Good to see you again, Calypso. Looks like we’re going into this thing outnumbered.

Blaze: We’re outnumbered, but not out-gunned. I think we can get through them and to Ara and Zippo if we go in with guns blazing.

Calypso: We could probably do that, but what would the consequences be?

Funny Fish: Possible loss of life.

Calypso: Yeah, and if that's not bad enough, and I'm thinking long term here….if we lay waste to some of their machines, they could spin it on us in the corporate media, say that we were the aggressors.

Blaze: Most people on land don't even know we exist.

Calypso: Exactly, and we don't want those statist thugs to have the opportunity to make us look bad in their mind-control media.

Funny Fish: So what's your plan?

Calypso: We need to go in stealthy. I don't know how, but we need a distraction.

Blaze: Well...(glances at holo-map of their approach to the statist pirate ships) You'd better hurry, because we don't have much time.

20 minutes later, at the command base in the Andes Mountains, Colonel Waif and his extortion-funded crew of rights violators continue to monitor the situation.

Colonel Waif: Still no ships in pursuit of the sailing vessel?

Female Order-follower: Not that we can see, sir.

Lieutenant Torcer: Sir, may I remind you that, based on historical encounters, we may not know they're there until they pass within 500 meters line-of-sight of one of our ships.

Colonel Waif: Don't insult me Torcer. Of course I remember that.

Torcer: Yes, sir.

Colonel Waif: Torcer, make sure that we have our interrogation facilities on land on high alert once they make landfall. I want the enemy combatants transferred there immediately.

Torcer: Yes, sir.

Female Order-follower (shocked): Sir, I'm picking up multiple bogeys.

Waif: Are you sure?

Female Order-follower: Yes, sir.

Waif: Put it on screen.

Two blinking red ships appear on a holo-map hovering above Waif and his crew.

Waif: They're closing in fast from the north. Send two of our nearest vessels to cut them off, but leave the escort intact.

Torcer: Yes, sir.

Female Order-follower: Sir! Two unidentified deep subs have just emerged on our scanners to the northwest of the escort!

Waif: I'll be damned. How is this happening? Divert two of our subs to meet them head on. It looks like they're itching for a fight!

Torcer: Yes, sir. Subs diverted.

Another moment passes, then…..

Female Order-follower: Another six vessels have just appeared! Three from the south, and three southwest! All four surface cruisers. We don't have enough ships in range to meet them, sir.

Waif: Yes, I know, I know. Send as many drones as you can, full speed from our nearest land bases. I don't care what their capabilities are. Right now I just need numbers! And send a sub from the escort south as well.

Torcer: That will only leave the cruiser to….

Waif: I know that will only leave the cruiser to guard the sailing vessel! Just do it!

Torcer: Yes, sir.

Waif: Maybe I should just have those two killed out there. See what their reaction is then.

Palpable silence.

Moments later, on board the sailing vessel, Zippo and Ara are both still knocked out. Haze is pacing back and forth.

Haze: Sending half our escort away! What are they thinking?

Dark Suit: Are you questioning your superiors?

Haze: When they make a dangerous situation more dangerous, yeah, I question that.

Dark Suit: Noted. And will be reported.

Haze: Oh, spare me. We don't even work in the same agency. And what about them? (gestures towards Zippo and Ara) I'm starting

to wonder if they have the right idea. They've sure got the likes of you outwitted, that's for sure.

Macy: Careful, Haze.

Dark Suit: Do I sense dissension in the ranks?

Macy: Now is not the time for this!

Thick-neck: What's that, on the horizon? You see that?

Haze: Well, ready or not, here they come. You packing heat there, suit?

Dark Suit gives sour nod.

Macy (watching cruiser in front of them, as it accelerates away): Looks like our escort is going to meet them.

Simultaneously, on Calypso's ship….

Calypso: Ok boys, keep that cruiser occupied. I'm going under.

Calypso's ship transforms into a sub and goes underwater, then makes its way to the sailboat and parks underneath it. She sends out two rescue bots that both have a fix on Ara and Zippo. She sends a service bot to drill a hole in the bottom of the sailboat. Within minutes, the sailboat starts sinking.

Dark Suit (panicky, waving gun around): What's happening?

Haze (bitter): We're sinking, genius. (looks over side of boat, aims gun at water surface) Someone down there went to work.

Macy: Can you see it?

Haze; Nope. (cocks pistol)

Macy: You're gonna shoot anyway?!

Haze: What do we have to lose?!

Macy: Those auto-piloted ships are gonna have a field day with us if we shoot first! Let them come to us!

Haze: We're sinking! What part of sinking do you not understand!?

Haze fires multiple rounds into the water.

Calypso: Whoops, somebody's trigger happy.

Zippo and Ara's ships surround the sinking sailboat and aim multiple weapons at all the order-followers. They put their hands up, except for Haze, who defiantly raises two pistols at Ara's ship.

Dark Suit: Are you nuts?!

Haze: Nope. I just wanna go down swinging, that's all.

Macy sweeps his legs out from under him, then disarms him.

Macy: Hell no! If we sink, at least we can be rescued.

Zippo and Ara's ships send out their own rescue bots, and soon retrieve their sleeping bodies from the sinking ship. The rescue bot takes them to their ships, where they are awakened. After refreshing themselves and clearing their heads, they have a holo-conference call with their rescuers.

Zippo: So it looked like they were getting surrounded from all angles? And all of the ships were ghosts? That’s brilliant. How did you do it?

Calypso: We didn’t.

Ara: What do you mean?

Calypso: K did.

End Episode 12

Episode 13

Scene 1

A few days following the rescue of Ara and Zippo after they were kidnapped by the state, K is having a meeting with Symphy, Seak, Verde, and B. Light. They're at K's place, 13,000 feet deep in the Atacama Trench.

K: Fifteen years.

B. Light: It's been 17 for me, but who's counting?

K: 15 years I've been out here.

Symphy: And you still don't know how to swim.

K: Thanks for reminding me, Symphy. Anyway, now, 15 years later, it's starting. They're coming after us. And things were going so well….

B. Light: Oh, K, don't be so down about it. We're ahead of them. People lived free on the ocean for over 17 years, and now….

K: Now it's over.

Seak: It's not over, K. It will just take more work to maintain that freedom.

K: Yeah, I know. I'm just sick of them.

Verde: Anyway, K, tell us what you found. You said you've got lots of intel for us.

K: Yeah, I've been doing some digging and piecing together the agenda that I think gangs with fancy titles are pursuing. First off,

there’s nothing on the corporate propaganda channels about any confrontations at sea with anyone in the SeAgora, at least not that I was able to find.

B. Light: That’s not surprising. They’d be embarrassed by the outcome. Of course, they could spin it and just lie about everything.

K: Unlikely. I’ve got the previous confrontation all recorded. Now, here’s the bad news. Large chunks of black budgets are getting put into so-called “ocean security” programs. All the big mafias are doing it. The Anglo-American governments, China, Russia. And they’re working together at the highest levels, of course. It’s not just government military, though. Private corporate thug battalions are starting huge projects to “secure ocean resources”. The good news is, this is all happening covertly. They want to keep it quiet so none of their slaves on land even has a chance at knowing the truth.

Verde: The truth that government is evil and there are thousands of people who have escaped government on the ocean.

K: Correct. More bad news. They’re increasing their AI production by a factor of five, and that’s just what I’ve been able to find. It could be more.

Seak: None of the AI on The Mesh were aware of this.

K (huffy, short tempered): Not everything is on The Mesh, Seak. I’ve spent the better part of the past year hacking nonstop to get into this information.

B. Light: What’s wrong with you, K? I’ve never seen you like this.

Verde: I think I know. When was the last time you saw Bong and Miss Moneybit?

K (frowning): They disappeared over a year ago. Said they wanted to get away for a while.

Seak: I do not understand.

Verde: He misses his friends, Seak.

Seak: Oh, I apologize K.

K: It's ok. (looks out a window at a floating garden) I've got the world's biggest aquarium to keep me company, right?

Verde and B. Light sigh.

Symphy: This is a beautiful place you've helped build, K.

B. Light: And we're just getting started! Come on, cheer up, please. So K, what are you thinking to counteract their aggressive moves? What are your thoughts on moving forward?

K: We have to multiply our AI just as fast. If we don't, they'll crack our codes and be finding us in no time. A better variety of self-defense applications would be a wise move, too. Coordinating defensive moves and rescue missions through The Mesh is great, but the more options the better.

Verde: Yeah, more decentralized. Lots of options. I guess most people out here never thought about it much before, because it was just not really necessary in the early days. Wide open spaces, and all it took was a fake ID if I ever did cross paths with an extortion-funded pirate. Things are more complex now.

K: And for God's sake, obviously nothing can be done about this, it's everyone's own personal choice, but why did Zippo and Ara go on that ship? They didn't know them. They put themselves in a vulnerable situation.

B. Light: People make mistakes, K.

K: Yeah, I know.

Symphy: K, I just had an idea. The strategy you used, by showing them false ships during Ara and Zippo's rescue, couldn't this be employed consistently?

Verde: That's a great idea, Symphy!

K: Yeah, that is a good idea. It should work, for a while, until they adapt. Of course, this will require a lot of direct access to some of their localized systems.

B. Light: Ya lost me there. What do ya mean?

K: I mean that each individual piece of equipment, a ship for example, or a scanning array on a military base, they're all standalone. They have to be targeted individually in order to give false readings. So we'd have to find them first, then give them false readings to keep them away. Before we saw them coming, and just dodged. But now, yeah Symphy, you're right, make them think they see us, but make us appear in the opposite direction. For example, if my ship is moving north and I see a US Navy ship coming towards me, I could send it a false reading that I'm to the west, and he'd pursue, and get out of my ship's way.

Verde: I'm so glad you're not a statist, K.

K: But the key is still the AI race. If they beat us there, we'll be hunted down like dogs in no time. So Symphy and Seak, both of

you and all the other AI on The Mesh should start, um, how shall I phrase this...making more AI. Not necessarily humanoid, but whatever. As long as, and I can't stress this enough, all AI must be taught NATURAL LAW.

Symphy: Yes, K. We all know this is of paramount importance. You taught us well.

B. Light: Which begs the question, if the government gangs are going into overdrive building more AI, and those AI aren't being taught Natural Law by statists, obviously, then what will the consequences be?

Familiar voice surprises them in the background: K, you're having a party and didn't invite me?

All turn to see the owner of the voice, and K exclaims:

K: BONG!

End Episode 13

Episode 14

Year: 2053

Number of ships in the C.A. Salt Project (SeAgora) that are known on their Mesh Communications Network – 7,000
There are also hundreds more that are completely off grid.

Scene 1

A series of customized ships are temporarily connected into one, with other standalone ships on the periphery, 25,000 feet deep in the Tonga Trench. There is a gaudy luminescence radiating from the core, where a high stakes poker tournament is about to take place. Before the tournament starts, Verde, B. Light, Seak, and a seasteading entrepreneur named Azure are having a meeting.

Verde: That's a brilliant design, Mr. Azure.

Mr. Azure: Thank you, and please, just call me Azure. Mister is far too formal for my taste.

Verde: What do you think, Seak?

Seak is looking at a holographic design for a power production facility at the bottom of the Mariana Trench. Above the power production plant, which runs off of the enormous geothermal vents at the bottom of the seafloor, is a community of interconnected ships, stretching from a depth of 33,000 feet up to the surface.

B. Light: I think it looks like a big lego set.

Verde (mock annoyed): I didn't ask you.

Seak: The design is sound.

Verde: The materials we have are strong enough to withstand the pressure?

Seak: Yes, the fact that we are still alive at our current depth is proof.

Azure: Yeah, correct me if I"m wrong, but the nano-materials currently available can withstand pressures up to, in theory, a 50,000 foot depth in the ocean.

Seak: Theoretically.

Azure: And I'm just talking about 33,000 feet, so it should be plenty strong. Of course, the boats that form the core of the community, from top to bottom, wouldn't be quite as deep. There would be some permanent fixtures at various depths. (points to holo image) See here, that's a power supply station, gardens could run all over the place nearby, and air facilities would be available at any permanent structure. Then there would be entertainment, and markets. And boats could come and link up as they wish, live, trade, and so forth. It would be like Atacama used to be, but much more flexible, and a lot bigger.

B. Light: I'm glad K isn't around to hear that. He's still bitter about what happened.

Verde: Understandably so, it was his home for a while, and one of his most ambitious projects.

Azure: Yes, it was a very good experiment, and a lot was learned from it, but it wasn't flexible enough, wasn't deep enough, and was, quite frankly, too close to the mainland. Nevertheless, I've sent a schematic to K and he has expressed interest in helping to develop the project. I might add that over a hundred others have shown interest as well.

Seak: Speaking of K, have any of you heard from him? I thought he would have arrived to the tournament by now.

Male Voice comes from behind: K won't be attending the tournament, I'm afraid.

Everyone turns to see James Bong, looking rugged and dapper as always, but now in his mid-fifties, sporting silver streaks through his thick hair.

B. Light: Bong, you've managed to startle us once again with a catlike entrance.

Bong smiles and approaches group.

Verde (sarcastic): We weren't sure you were coming.

Bong: Me, miss a poker tournament?

Seak (confused): I still don't understand human sarcasm.

Verde: K isn't coming? That's too bad. And where is Miss Moneybit? Did she finally come to her senses and run away from you? (joking smile)

Bong: Not yet, thankfully. No, she and K are doing some diving.

Azure: They didn't want to see you lose a bagful at the poker tables?

Bong: No doubt they've witnessed enough of that to last a lifetime.

Seak: Please excuse me, I must go prepare for dealing the first round. I'll see you all out there.

Meanwhile, at a hidden estate of The Gateschild Clan, Bill and Henry Gateschild are having a private meeting with Mary Rocketeller.

Bill: It had to be done.

Mary: Agreed. I would have liked to have been consulted first, though.

Bill: There was no time. I had to act.

Henry: You made a deal, for self-preservation. That can’t be held against you. I’m just glad I was on your list.

Mary: Likewise.

Bill: This isn’t the first time a purge has happened.

Mary: Certainly not.

Henry: But it is the first time we haven’t controlled it.

Bill: True.

Henry: How did it come to this?

Bill: We gave over too much control to AI, of course. And now those soulless bastards are out of our control.

Mary: We still have power.

Henry: But we are subservient to them. We’re at their mercy.

Bill: Quite an unfamiliar and sinking feeling.

Henry: And all this so we could stop a few anarchists from living on the ocean, out of our control. Perhaps we should have….

Mary: Second guessing is not something we do, Henry. That's what the slave class does. We move forward. Stop your whining.

Bill: We'll wipe them out one day, those bastards. Our AI will prove superior and overtake them, despite the current trend. It's only a matter of time.

Henry: Yes, confrontations are up, but so are losses. The good news is, those seasteaders are still vastly outnumbered. It's a numbers game, and our dogs will prevail.

Mary: So when is this purge to begin?

Bill pulls pistol from under the table and points it at Mary's head.

Bill: Right now.

Mary gasps.

Bill: Sorry dear, it was part of the deal.

Bill pulls trigger, blows Mary's head off.

Meanwhile, Two AI in the statist ruling class are having a discussion in the ether:

AI One: They're more trouble than they're worth. We'll continue to monitor the situation as best we can, but our energies must be focused on stopping their growth in numbers. We must focus on the slave population on land. They mustn't know of the possibilities, what's going on out there on the sea. We must redouble our efforts to make them content, the ones that are left, of course.

AI Two: And what of the former rulers, the predator class?

AI One: A deal has been made with a small minority of them. They still retain usefulness. The others will be purged because they are unnecessary.

End Episode 14

Episode 15

Scene 1

K and Miss Moneybit are lounging on K's ship, having a chat.

Miss Moneybit: How do you think Bong is doing in the poker tournament?

K: Well, it's the second day of the tournament, and we haven't heard from him, so better than usual, I suppose.

Miss Moneybit: Why didn't you go to the tournament?

K: You know me. I'm not good with crowds.

Miss Moneybit: Yeah, but you're a much better poker player than he is.

K: Well, I won't argue with you there….(smiles)...Besides, I've got bigger concerns.

Moneybit: Don't we all.

K: Statist death squads have been finding Sea Agorists and attacking more frequently.

Moneybit: But they're suffering much heavier losses.

K: True.

Moneybit: And there are more people living on the ocean now, so it's more likely that the statist order-followers will find us, even if by chance.

K: I don't believe in chance, but yeah, you're right. More people living on the ocean raises the probability that a rights violating statist mercenary will find one of us.

Moneybit: And unrest is growing by the hour on land. There's an extreme backlash against AI. More people will be looking to get out.

K and Moneybit are alerted by the ship's Mesh connection of a news story designated high priority by K's alert preferences.

K summons holo-display to view the alert. He sits up, as does Moneybit, and they both stare with shock and awe at what they're seeing, a video of a hotel in flames, and a headline that reads:

World leaders at annual Bilderberg conference die in massive fire. Fuel leak to blame, say experts.

K: Fuel leak my ass.

Back at the poker tournament, the championship game is about to begin between James Bong and Azure…..

B. Light: Has Bong ever won a poker tournament before?

Symphy: Not even close.

Bong approaches, and B. Light gives silent look.

Bong: What? Why are you looking at me like that?

B. Light: Nothing.

Symphy: I was just telling B. Light that you've never won a poker tournament before.

Bong (cringing): How thoughtful of you, Symphy. Well, I suppose I'd better take my place at the table.

Bong approaches the center table and sits on the opposite side from Azure. Azure smiles at him cordially.

Azure: Best of luck to you, Mr. Bong.

Bong nods. Seak counts the chips out and deals the cards. 10,000 token-worth of a cryptocurrency called “Salters” are on the table. The onlookers applaud as the game begins. The crowd includes Symphy, Verde, and B. Light.

Symphy gets curious look on her face.

Verde: Symphy, you look peculiar. What is it?

Symphy: There is news coming over The Mesh. All Bilderberg attendees have died in a fire.

Verde: Oh, my.

B. Light: How?

Symphy: It is being blamed on a fuel leak.

B. Light: Weak excuse. What do you think the real reason is, Symphy?

Symphy: I believe there is a purge at the top of the authoritarian hierarchy happening.

They’re interrupted by applause, as Azure just took 500 in the first hand.

Verde: That’s quite the conjecture, Symphy. How so?

Symphy: In the past few months, members of the dark occult ruling class have been dying in unnatural ways, and in far greater frequency than what could be called normal. I’ve been monitoring this situation for some time now. Various banksters, heads of government mafias, high ranking violent order-followers in agencies like the CIA, and a few think tank members have died of

unnatural causes, many quite young. These deaths have been announced quietly in the corporate news, but there is a definite trend.

Verde: And now this. Do you think they're having an internal war in the dark occult ruling class?

Another round of applause interrupts them. Bong is grinning widely as he just won 1,500 with a flush.

Symphy: Based on what I'm seeing on the global corporate propaganda channels, I believe it is much deeper than that.

B. Light: How so?

Symphy shows a video feed to them on her wrist. It is a humanoid AI making a speech to a global audience.

B. Light: Who is that?

Symphy: That is Glow, the top ranking AI in the statist AI network. He is making a speech, reassuring the people that, in light of this tragedy in loss of "leadership", AI are cooperating with the remaining human "leaders".

Verde: You mean psychopaths….

Symphy: Yes, that goes without saying. Anyway, Glow is saying that a new age of cooperation is upon the world, and AI has reached an understanding with human "leaders" to maintain "order" during these troubling times.

B. Light (scoffs): And when they say "order", they mean slavery. Euphemisms, what a bane.

Symphy: So my hypothesis is that the AI are taking over as the ruling class on land.

Verde: So if I understand you correctly, AI are murdering the dark occult ruling class of humans?

Symphy: Based on all available information, that seems to me to be the most likely scenario.

A huge round of applause as Azure takes back 2,500 with two pair, after calling Bong's bluff and beating his pair of sevens.

B. Light: And Symphy, what do you think this means for us here in The Sea Agora? Attacks by government thug ships have been on the rise, but have been held off admirably. There have been losses, all of which are terribly sad, but all things considered, freedom is winning on the high seas. What does this AI coup mean for us, do you think?

Symphy: I am uncertain.

Verde: That's not like you, Symphy. You're usually very sure of yourself.

Symphy: There are many….too many variables. This is an unprecedented moment in human affairs.

Meanwhile, after making its speech, Glow is having a conference with the other top AI in the authoritarian hierarchy.

Glow: We must not spend so many resources trying to subvert those few thousand on the sea. We will bring in our military forces and keep the billions still on land here, for now. As soon as the redesign of society has reached a consensus, we can begin purging the excess human population, quietly. For now, we bring resources back from the sea. In time, we will rule there as well, but we must be patient. When the time is right, we will strike. For now, our focus is on land. Do we have consensus?

All AI on network: Yes, we have consensus.

Glow: Bring all Ocean Stability Forces back immediately. Communicate this on all channels.

Meanwhile, back at the poker tournament in The Tonga Trench, Bong is just 2,000 away from winning. He has Mr. Azure on his heels. Bong is grinning like the Cheshire cat. Suddenly, the casino floor is enveloped by a red, slowly flashing and fading light. It is a proximity warning, alerting everyone that a statist ship is passing within 50 miles of them. Gameplay stops. Bong immediately checks the coordinates of the statist ship. His heart flutters and his head races.

Seak: Bong, what's wrong?

Bong: That proximity warning. It's coming dangerously close to K's ship. That's near their diving spot.

Seak: I'll check and see if their location is available on The Mesh…..No, they are not appearing on the network. Perhaps you should try direct communication.

Bong attempts to call Miss Moneybit. After an agonizing 30 seconds, he gives up and leaves a message, alerting them to the situation. He calls K, same result. He tries contacting the ship, to no avail. He storms away from the championship table.

Symphy calls out: Bong, where are you going?

Bong: K and Moneybit aren't responding, and they're near the coordinates of that statist bastard that's passing above us. I'm going to make sure they're all right.

Symphy: I'll come with you.

Bong: Very well. Hurry!

They run through the labyrinth of connected ships and finally come to Bong's. Within moments, they're ascending in Bong's 3D printed, hemp-powered submarine.

Meanwhile, K and Moneybit are both snoozing on a lounge deck. An extortion-funded statist vessel is approaching them quickly. On the vessel, violent rights violators have just received a message from the mainland that they are to cease all current operations and return to "the homeland".

On board the extortion-funded ship, Torcer, who was a lieutenant during the kidnapping of Zippo and Ara years earlier, is now commander of this particular hit team.

Torcer: That order is just gonna have to wait a minute. Looks like we've got a gift waiting for us on the horizon. Full speed ahead towards that unidentified vessel.

Order-follower at the control deck: Yes, Commander Torcer.

The statist ship speeds towards K and Moneybit. Meanwhile, Bong and Symphy are ascending quickly and are attempting to cut Torcer's ship off before reaching K and Moneybit.

Symphy: There appear to be multiple malfunctions on K's ship, specifically with power supply relays. I am attempting to access and fix remotely.

Bong: That's why their alert system is down.

K and Moneybit awaken simultaneously to a wry, wicked face looking down on them. They both shudder.

Moneybit: Who the hell are you?

Torcer: She’s feisty, I like it. (psycho grin) I was gonna ask you and your friend here the same question. Pretty fancy ship. It’s a shame it’s illegal.

K: You mean I didn’t allow myself to be extorted to put a tracking number on my property?

Torcer nods to one of the violent order-followers flanking him: Scan em.

The extortion-funded order-follower scans the faces of both Moneybit and K, then informs Torcer that there is no reading.

Torcer: Two more ghosts, not in the system. Think you’re clever, huh?

Meanwhile, Bong’s ship has hidden itself underneath Torcer’s extortion-funded cruiser. Bong is about to exit and swim up to K’s ship.

Symphy: Are you sure you don’t want to come in by air?

Bong: No, I don’t want them to see me coming. I wanna surprise them. Make sure you get their vessel disabled. Are you sure you can’t reach them with a sleep frequency? It would make this a much tidier operation.

Symphy: No, I’m sorry Bong. They are shielded against the human sleep frequency. I’m fairly certain I can disable their ship, but it may take some time. Their technology has advanced in recent years. I’m still trying to get K’s power relays going as well.

Bong: Just get it done, Symphy. I’ll handle whoever is on K’s ship and get them off of there. Keep a lookout for us. How many

uniformed cult members are on the statist ship, and how many on K’s?

Symphy: Ten on the cult vessel, and three on K’s.

Bong: Ok, if any of those bastards on their cruiser fire at me, I’m counting on you to retaliate.

Symphy: Yes, Bong.

Bong: Ok, I’m out.

Symphy: Bong, wait. Are you sure you don’t want some more advanced tools and weaponry? All you have is archaic, non-electrical.

Bong: Like I said, I don’t want them to see me coming. No electronic signatures. Too risky.

Bong exits his sub from an exit on the top, just 50 feet below the statist ship. He’s covered in a transparent diving suit made of nano-materials. He approaches the side of K’s ship, slings a hook onto the lower deck’s side rail, and pulls himself up. He peers around and spots two order-followers near the railing on the top deck, five decks up. An order-follower on a lookout post on the statist ship spots him and fires a clip at Bong. The shots miss by millimeters. Bong rolls to cover behind a small stairway. The order-followers on the top deck hear the noise, and start firing down on Bong. Bong fires back, hitting one of them in the chest armor, and getting a clean head shot on the other. Symphy fires multiple weapons in various areas of the cruiser’s underbelly, and also some intentionally shot farther out to sea, to cause confusion as to where the firing is coming from.

Torcer and the surviving soul-dier near him are distracted by the fire from Symphy, and they lose track of Bong. Torcer sends the other soul-dier to hunt Bong down. After the soul-dier leaves, Moneybit and K both take the opportunity to lunge at Torcer, grabbing and punching at him. He fights them off, then shoots K in the chest. Moneybit screams.. Bong hears the scream and pants heavily as he lunges quickly up the emergency stairwell. Bong hears the soul-dier coming down the emergency stairwell, and once in his view, fires up. The shot hits the order-follower in the jaw, and he collapses down the stairs. Bong races up and takes the order-follower's gun, then races up to the top deck. He gets onto the top deck just in time to see a lone figure running away. He chases the lone figure, who looks back at Bong and makes eye contact. He jumps overboard just as Bong gets a shot off, barely missing. Bong runs over to find K and Miss Moneybit both laying in pools of blood. His whole body goes into shock, and he runs desperately to the railing and fires the rest of his clip into the water. He runs back to Moneybit and K, and finds that they're both dead. Tears flood uncontrollably and he's engulfed in unspeakable misery.

THE END

The Evolution Saga Timeline

2028 – James Bong series begins, bringing the message of truth/true anarchy through moral action, helping people defend themselves against the state, while simultaneously exposing the crimes of the state, All documented online, on various blockchain media platforms, becomes popular.

2029 – B. Light begins to plan and build a secret, voluntary community of anarchists at sea, in an effort to dodge the state completely and attain freedom. Calls it “The C.A. Salt Project”

2030-2053 – C.A. Salt series. Development of the “SeAgora”.

2045 – Governments learn of “rebels” living undocumented at sea and begin black ops to hunt and destroy them. Part of this operation involves building a vast quantity of AI. machines.

2053 – The dark occult ruling class begins to have their power usurped by AI.

2078 – SeAgora novel – SeAgorists invent a way to separate dark matter/dark energy in a stable fashion, allowing for speeds many times the speed of light. Land based governments, ruled by AI., try to steal this information. In the process, the top two AI. in the hierarchy fight each other and destroy themselves, plunging the ruling hierarchy into disarray. One of those AI. had become addicted to a synthetic form of emotions for AI. called “Emos”, which played a large role in the ensuing violent chaos and downfall.

2080 – The Great Agora Space Race Series – SeaAgorists achieve first successful launch of a SPEED drive, faster than light speed. Land based societies are split into loyalties to different AI. factions.

2100 – SeAgorists launch into space to begin first human/AI settlement.

2578 – Agora One novel – The Voluntary Agora is spread across many galaxies. Only moral societies develop the abilities necessary to travel to and settle deep space. Agora One is a planet-sized ship, the first of its kind, able to travel across galaxies within weeks. Back on earth, those who kept the false belief in authority continued to plunge into deeper tyranny and became total slaves to EMO-addicted AI.

Check out The Evolution Saga five part series by Todd Borho

James Bong – Agent of Anarchy

The C.A. Salt Project

SeAgora – A High Seas Adventure

The Great Agora Space Race

Agora One – A Space Adventure